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CONSTANCE RIVERS.

VOL. III.

CONSTANCE RIVERS.

BY

LADY BARRETT LENNARD.

“ My fondest—faintest—latest accents hear—
Grief for the dead not Virtue can reprove ;
Then give me all I ever ask'd—a tear,
The first—last—sole reward of so much love !”
The Corsair.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

L O N D O N :

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CHAPTER I.

“ Who may minister to thee?
Summer herself should minister
To thee, with fruitage golden-rinded
On golden salvers ; or, it may be,
Youngest Autumn in a bower,
Grape thickened from the light, and blinded
With many a deep-hued, bell-like flower
Of fragrant trailers.”

TENNYSON.

THE thirtieth of August dawned with the promise of a glorious day. The saffron light streamed through those soft white mists which, when dispersed by warmth and brightness, leave no dread of rain or storm.

Sir Richard, on the alert at five o'clock, whilst yet undressed, peeped behind his window-blind, and saw the park already alive with waggons, horses, carpenters, and the emissaries of Messrs. Birch.

Three o'clock had been the hour named for the assemblage of guests ; for Lady Levinge knew that it was of importance not to allow the revellers to weary of their revels—which must be the case when folks have eaten and drunk sufficiently, and cannot have the satisfaction of anticipating a fresh appetite ; and then know not what to do with themselves, and

“ Yawn their joys, and thank misery
For change, though sad.”

To be sure, the young ladies strive to attract young gentlemen with hope of an establishment ; and young gentlemen calculate to a nicety how far they may go without committing themselves. Married ladies, young, and even those no longer young, sometimes burn with a passion, mad and intense, for some young bachelor, who finds it pleasant to talk to a woman, well-bred and beautiful, without the dread of the

observation, "You had better speak to papa." The love of a married woman is for the most part disinterested—they can gain no establishment, the ambition of their younger sisters ; but they can lose one, and "all the advantage of a virtuous station."

Coralie enjoyed to the utmost that station, and her husband's wealth. She loved Sir Richard and her child, yet she would have sacrificed them all to win from Eustace but half the consuming passion she lavished on him. In truth, she had never loved before, though she had experienced a gentle preference and a tender affection for Sir Richard, which he fully deserved. Now she would have said,

"There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned."

All this is very sad, and the historian will not linger longer than is necessary on this part of the *fête*. Rather let him contem-

plate the animated background formed by nature and art to make this scene lovely.

Soon after three o'clock carriage after carriage deposited their quaintly attired burthens at the steps of the entrance to Earlscliff. Within the shadow of the portico, which was supported by marble pillars, Lady Levinge, dressed as Cleopatra, reclined luxuriously on a damask couch, attended by two young ladies in similar costumes, representing Charmion and Iras; beautiful children, dressed as Cupids, were fanning her with their wings, which made the air heavy with perfumes. Massive gold vases and baskets were piled with fruits; and goblets sparkled with iced wines, which Charmion and Iras handed to the company as they passed into the library, which contained all necessary for the repair of charms which the sun might have looked on too ardently in the long journey to Earlscliff.

A number of cheval-glasses reflected the fair guests to their own satisfaction ; and maidens attended with all the little etceteras to make them beautiful or keep them neat, so necessary after a hot drive in an August sun. There, towards the end of the day, did these fair creatures find satin and kid slippers of every size and colour, and white gloves of every number, provided for the convenience of those who might have suffered from too much exertion ; and with shawls of various textures, lest future colds and coughs might mar the pleasant recollections of the *fête champêtre* at Earlscliff.

“When awful beauty” had “put on all her charms”—even those trivial ones which linger in pearl-powder and carmine—the guests were conducted through the marble hall into the gardens. These were extensive, and led into a stately deer-park. The grounds were diversified by hill and dale,

and the blooming scene was now animated by gay crowds in sparkling dresses, and rich velvets and satins, which, ever moving, were caught and reflected in the bosom of the tranquil lake.

Lady Levinge, that “serpent of old Nile,” looked keenly at the groups of guests who came, and were directed by her attendants to “bend adoring” as they passed her. An attendant in an Egyptian dress, announced the different parties as they entered the hall, both with their real names and assumed characters. And Coralie gave a kindly smile and a gracious bow to each, as her maidens pressed wine and fruit on them.

First came a family party of a father, uncle, and daughter as Sir Roger de Coverley, Will Honeycomb, and the charming widow, whom Sir Roger led along by the tips of her delicate fingers, whilst she looked shyly and coquettishly, the closed fan pressed

against her ruby lips. They were followed by two full-blown dames in rich blue and orange skirts drawn up through the pocket-holes, quilted satin petticoats, and steeple-crowned hats, Mistresses Page and Ford, attended by a neighbouring Squire puffing under the padding with which he had emulated the size of Sir John Falstaff.

Streams of company followed—queens, princesses, peasants, warriors, monks, fortune-tellers, and gipsies. Still Lady Levinge did not catch the name she longed to hear—those of Sir Eustace, Lady Yorke, and Miss Rivers. For the admiration of Eustace had that wonderful dress been constructed, which, by its tightness, showed the perfection of Coralie's figure; it was cut low across the bosom, over which black tresses of hair descended, and seemed to be formed by a succession of glittering scales of blue and gold. The effect was so extraordinary,

and the tableau formed by the lady and her Egyptian attendants, surrounded by vessels of gold and vessels of silver, piled up with fruits and fragrant with flowers, whose tints were caught and multiplied in the metallic surfaces around them, was so gorgeous, that few of the guests ever forgot the impression it made on their senses.

At length a slight young girl ran up the steps of the portico, and waited with an anxious look till the lady from whom she had been separated, by the pressure of the crowd round the door, should join her. She was dressed in a tight black silk dress, cut low on the bust, which was covered by a muslin kerchief. The dress was short, and showed a pair of dainty ankles, with white silk stockings, terminated by little feet encased in shiny leather shoes and buckles. Her dark hair was gathered loosely to the top of her head, from whence it fell in curls, sur-

mounted by a small hat of black velvet, trimmed with black lace. Mittens and a white embroidered apron completed the costume.

Coralie saw the pure-looking beauty of the dress—the brilliant skin, the perfectly formed oval of the face, and the soft magic of those blue shadowed eyes of the wearer of it, and hated the magnificence in which she had adorned herself.

“It must be she,” she said, turning pale.

“There cannot be two such——”

At this moment a stately lady moved forward, and the servant announced—

“Lady Yorke and Miss Rivers, as Lady Davers and Pamela.”

The sound of their names reminded Lady Yorke of their assumed characters, and she said, drawing Constance’s arm within her own,

“Sweet sparkler, be not dashed at this majestic presence; my nephew will soon

arrive to re-assure your sinking spirits." Then bowing to Lady Levinge, she said, "Rare Egyptian!—"

Lady Levinge suggested—

"The juice of Egypt's grapes shall moist your lip."

But Lady Davers replied—

"Neither my niece nor I are used to take strong waters of a morning. If 'twas my Cousin Jackey, indeed——"

But before the sentence was concluded fresh arrivals distracted the attention of the hostess, and Lady Davers and Pamela moved forward.

"Alas! dear lady," said Pamela, clinging to the arm of her *chaperon*, "surely I see the infamous Mrs. Jewkes?"

"Be assured, sweet mistress," replied the lady. "No harm shall accrue to thee under my protection; but methinks the name of that burly female is Gamp."

And Sir Richard, with half-closed eyes, and a benevolent expression of face, came up—attracted by the beauty of the girl, and the distinguished air of her *chaperon*—dressed in perfection of likeness to that well-known individual.

“Seasonable weather, ladies! As may well be when cucumbers is twopen half-penny each, and pickled salmon is fourpence the pound! Here’s my card, my sweet young creeter! There’s no saying when the hour may come. Gamp sicklies and monthlies turn and turn with Betsy Prig. I was a sorry to understand”—severely—“that you did all your work at home, my lady, and defrauded the reglars. You and this sweet young creeter have been at death’s door, and never sent for Sarai Gamp! But no malice bore. Let us take a drink together for better acquaintance.”

And Sarah produced a tea-pot, with a wink, indicating that it held something better than tea. But the ladies put away the proffered beverage, and smilingly walked on.

“A sweet gal! but not long for this world, or my name’s not Gamp!” said Sir Richard, thoughtfully.

The company spread themselves over the gardens and park. Croquet and archery amused both the players and the lookers-on. Cleopatra did not compete for the prize of the latter game. Seated on some magnificent Indian shawls, of scarlet, worked with gold, she reclined on the turf, overlooking the archers, and holding in her hand the first prize, a valuable necklace, and the second, a silver arrow. She looked on listlessly, and a cloud had gathered on her lovely brow, for Eustace had not appeared. She sickened at the moving mass of gay colours which formed the crowd outside the

barriers, which had been placed to keep them off and allow uninterrupted space to the archers. A Robin Hood and Maid Marian came to contend for the prizes. Captain Lymerton was the bold forester, and a youthful cornet in his regiment was arrayed as the maid. Each delivered his arrow. That of the Captain quivered in the red—the cornet's struck the edge of the blue and red.

“I claim seven for the red,” and the claim was silently allowed.

“Are there none others to contend?” said Lady Levinge, and as she spoke Eustace had wandered up to her side, and could not mistake the beautiful glow that flushed her cheeks and brow at seeing him unexpectedly. Her eyes beamed with pleasure. She had feared he would not come. Yet the vividness of her emotion made her silent, hesitating, and, for the first time in her life,

almost awkward. "Will you not shoot?" said she. "I thought it was quite in your way."

"Who shall venture to contend with the bold forester?" replied Eustace, smiling.

He had an instinctive conviction that Lymerton did not like him.

"Let this prize tempt you," rejoined the lady. "If all accounts we hear be true, there is one fair throat round which you would like to place it. Especially as there must be a scar there," she added, spitefully, "that love should conceal, as love occasioned its infliction."

She held up a rich chain, embossed at small distances with amethysts placed in the form of roses—like those used as emblems by the unfortunate Anne Boleyn. Small diamonds were placed in the centre of each, to represent the sparkle of dew-drops. An expression of vexation passed

over the face of Eustace.

“She has begun on me already,” was his thought; and answering only by a grave bow, he stepped forward, and indicated his wish to contend for the prize.

Eustace was as nervous as a child, and he still suffered from what might be considered a great physical defect, were it not generally accompanied by much sensibility, and balanced by excessive daring. The conversation he had had with Lady Levinge had disturbed his equanimity, and his trembling hand sent the arrow to the edge of the black 3, instead of the centre of the target. There was a murmur of disapprobation from the spectators, and Eustace saw a well-bred effort to suppress a smile on the faces of his competitors. It was lucky for him that his temper was well under control, for he felt it rising in the quick beatings of his heart.

Whilst Robin Hood and Maid Marian were about to shoot again, Eustace caught the anxious face of his mother and Constance fixed on him—they were so eager he should win. He steadied himself when he prepared to take a second shot. Captain Lymerton's arrow this time pierced the bull's-eye—Maid Marian's the edge of it, and their success produced a cheer from the spectators—the ladies waving their embroidered handkerchiefs. Eustace took his position, and delivered his shot. The arrow struck the very centre of the gold.

“Well done!” shouted several voices, amongst them the cheery tones of Mrs. Gamp.

“Take a sup out of my pot of porter,” said she, extending it at arm's length over the barrier. “Porter's a drink as never checks the perspiration, says Mrs. Harris to me; and so I've found it,” she added,

devoutly lifting the pewter mug, and draining the contents, without waiting for Eustace to accept her invitation.

“Heavens!” said Coralie to herself, as this speech was followed by a roar of laughter. “How can I be expected to love a Mrs. Gamp?”

There were no smiles either concealed or evident on the faces of Robin Hood or his companion this time. Lymerton’s arrow struck the centre of the red, and Marian’s wandered to the extremity of the white rim. There was a dead silence. Robin Hood had scored nineteen with his three shots. Eustace could scarcely hope to be so skilful or fortunate as to hit the bull’s-eye again. He fired, and his arrow quivered in its centre, and again there was a cheer. Eustace scored three for the black, and two nines for the bull’s-eye. A loud cheer for the young officer, whose dark blue Lancer

uniform was loaded with decorations, rung through the old woods of Earlscliff as the announcement was made, and Eustace was duly conducted to the feet of Cleopatra to receive the necklace, which gleamed from its purple velvet case.

Coralie's hand trembled as she presented it to Eustace. She had wished with all her heart that he should win it, because she loved him, and now she was seized with jealousy lest he should carry out her suggestion, and present it to Constance.

Eustace could not forget the blush which had mantled on Coralie's face when she first saw him unexpectedly at her side, and was troubled by the remembrance. This feeling gave a consciousness to his look and manner as he knelt to receive the prize, which made Lady Levinge thrill throughout her frame with pleasure.

“He knows I love him. He has found

it out—he loves me in return!” were the thoughts which careered through her brain, and made her hesitate and spoil her little speech got up beforehand to greet the victor. She knew not what she said, nor what Eustace answered—it was something about gems being priceless when bestowed by her fair hand; and as the cheers were repeated enthusiastically, she supposed that they had both played their parts with due decorum.

The conclusion of the archery was the signal for the adjournment to the house for refreshments. Sir Richard had wisely concluded that his guests would eat and drink with more satisfaction under the cover of his noble roof, and with their legs properly disposed under his dining-tables, than under trees, where no friendly sideboard was at hand with supplies of fresh glasses, and with

legs drawn up like tailors, excruciating the muscles of those unaccustomed to that position. Lively earwigs, too, are abundant in August, and ladies might have found them disposed to be too intimate. This Sir Richard explained in the character of Mrs. Gamp, as he was being escorted by Sir Roger de Coverley to the house.

“And very true, too, mum,” said a magnificent figure sailing up to his side, dressed as Zenobia, Queen of the East; “what you observes is quite correct; and what I underwent when I was a gal along with them cockchaffers no one can tell. You must know I was a-walking one Sunday evening all in my best, along with a young man as I thought might like to be *my* young man—so you see I wanted to be very particular—and *he* was *particular*, I can’t but say he was, in saying nice things to me—more by the way, as he brought a pint of shrimps in

his pocket for tea, which was kind, though hot and flabby. Well, we walked and we walked, and our steps got slower and slower, and the path led along the outside of an oak wood. Well—my blood always runs cold with a cockchaffer ever since my little brother put one down my back with a pin in it, to buzz-buzz—well, them nasty things kept bouncing in my face, and booming inside my bonnet-strings, till, says I, ‘I must turn back’—but lawks! we was just half-way along the wood then—*outside* the wood, you must understand, mum, for I was always on my P’s and Q’s. So we turned, and I was hoping to be comfortable, when I felt something a-crawling up the clock of my stocking—the inside clock, you know, mum. I knocked my ankles together, to get it off; but I was a modest gal, mum, and to tell the young man my quandary, I’d rather have died. Well, the creeter

stopped, but he didn't fall—such wonderful sticky legs he had !”

“I beg your pardon, gracious Queen—who had the sticky legs—your young man ?”

“No, mum ; his legs was beautiful—like this old gent's here.”

Sir Roger bowed low over her Majesty's hand.

“Pray, go on—we are burning with anxiety to know the proceedings of the gentleman with the sticky legs.”

“'Twas no gentleman at all, but a poor misguided cockchaffer, a-crawling and a-crawling up my leg. I bore it pretty well till it got over my garter—I garter alow the knee—and dragged its nasty little hairy legs over my stocking, till it got right in front of my knee ; then, says I in desperation, for he was getting very tender——”

“Who?—the young gentleman, or the cockchaffer?”

“Why, the cockchaffer—no, no, the gent, to be sure. Says I, ‘I’ll be dashed if I believe a syllable your a-saying on,’ and with that I slapped my open hand on my knee—so, and the nasty thing was all squashed, and tumbled down flat as a pancake.”

“Bless me! how very lucky you was, mum, to catch him so easily; but the young man can’t have been quite pleased with what you said, I should think.”

“Well, mum, he didn’t like it much, and he walked home quite mumchance.”

“Come, your Majesty,” said Mrs. Gamp, “let me find you a place at the table, that you may pick a bit.”

“I shan’t be sorry, mum; and you seem to be a decent body. But it ain’t manners to sit down without the master nor missis,

to say you're welcome. I got a card from my Lady Levinge, inviting me to come to this affair, with a hard name, but I've never set eyes on her, nor on Sir Richard, this blessed day."

"There is Lady Levinge now taking her seat at the head of the table. Sir Richard is somewhere at the side."

"O-o-o-o-h!" said Zenobia, with an expression of wonder and awe, "she is dressed beautiful!—just like a serpent! Well, I thought my dress was fine, but my lady beats me," and Mrs. Mag looked disconsolately on her flowing robe of cloth of gold and blue satin petticoat; "it ain't so bad, neither," she said, complacently.

"I assure your Majesty," said Sir Roger, gallantly, "that your dress has not its equal in magnificence in the company;" and the good-natured woman expanded into smiles of satisfaction at the compliment; whilst

taking the cue from Sir Richard, Sir Roger paid her profound attention, and supplied all her requirements of food and wine.

In the meantime, Saint Cyr, arrayed as Mark Antony, in a dress which showed the perfection of his figure, hovered round the languid "Eastern star," whose suspicious eyes sought in vain for Eustace in the principal room. All the lower rooms of the house were set out with refreshments, for the benefit of the guests, Sir Richard having a painful recollection in by-gone parties of having to stand till fair creatures with murderous appetites were satisfied. "No, the men shall sit by their partners—they shall have a fair chance."

Lady Levinge felt that Eustace was in another room, with his mother and Constance. "What would he do with the necklace?" She wished he would offer it to her

—not that she cared to have it, otherwise than as his gift. Then she doubted whether he could offer it back to her, she being the donor of the prize. She trusted he would not give it to any but his mother. She thought he would not—certainly he would not—after those symptoms of agitation he had shown on kneeling at her feet. So she tried to rally her spirits, and answer the *badinage* of Saint Cyr ; and was comforted in some degree by the Perigord pie and the iced champagne, and by the end of the repast she had regained a large amount of good spirits and sweet temper.

In the meantime, Eustace had joined Lady Davers and Pamela. He was very happy, for he had forgotten Lady Levinge, in seeing Constance's look of anxiety about his success, and he held the jewel-case tightly in his hand, eager to offer it to his mother, who he knew would refuse it, as she had

never worn ornaments since the death of his father. Then he would ask permission to clasp the gem round the slender neck of his darling, whom he loved all the more for the small red scar which the necklace would conceal, notwithstanding the sneer of her ladyship.

“Mother, I have brought you my prize,” he said, looking at her anxiously, and leading her aside into a shady knoll.

“My son,” replied Lady Yorke, “you are always dutiful ; but give it to Constance. I never wear ornaments,—all I possess of my own in that way will belong to your wife.”

He looked for Constance, and saw her coming anxiously towards Lady Yorke, scared at being alone in such a crowd even for a moment.

“Constance—Miss Rivers,” he said, blushing, “will you accept my winnings? Will

you honour me by letting me clasp this pretty bauble round your neck?"

Constance looked distressed. Her eyes filled with tears, and she became very pale.

"Don't be a goose, Constance," said her ladyship, impatiently. "I want my food, so let Eustace put the ornament on, and then he must find us a seat at some of the luncheon tables."

Constance's smiles contended with her tears, as she saw the costly necklace, and felt it encircle her throat. She made a pretty little curtsy in her character of Pamela, and said "the dear gentleman was very generous;" whilst Eustace longed to kiss the back of the beautiful neck which his fingers had touched.

When they had partaken of refreshments, Eustace asked his mother if she would like to ramble with Constance and himself

through the grounds, with which he was well acquainted. She pointed to some of the valuable paintings which covered the walls, and said she could enjoy “warbling woodlands,” and “the pomp of groves” any day ; but the choice works of art which then surrounded her did not often come within her ken, and she should prefer staying in the house, especially as, since all the rooms were clearing fast, she should have the inspection all to herself, probably.

“Will you come?” said Eustace, offering his arm to Constance..

“May I not stay with you, ma’am?” said Constance, timidly.

“Certainly not—walking will do you good, if you do not carry it to excess.”

And the young people left her. Constance and Eustace walked in silence for some distance. There was an ornamental erection of stone, surrounded by lofty elms, whither

the company seemed to congregate; and Eustace, who would have preferred a solitary walk with Constance, drew her out of the stream of gaily-dressed ladies and gentlemen, to a more deserted locality; but she withdrew her arm, and said,

“Let us see what those people are about.”

Eustace, never accustomed to woo for preference, and a little affronted, followed the impulse given by her arm, and a few minutes brought them to what appeared an ancient fountain. At one side water spouted from a lion's mouth with an archway; but whence it sprung remained a mystery. A statue of a Cupid, leaning on his unstrung bow, surmounted the structure, and on a tablet below his feet were inscribed the following lines:—

“Gentle virgin, draw ye near,
Nor the magic fountain fear;

If no thought nor act of shame,
 May thy maiden beauty stain,
 Dip thy fingers in the stream,
 And thy hands will whiter gleam;
 But if love has ruled thy life,
 Even as a wedded wife,
 Tinted then those hands will be,
 And the stream will blush for thee."

A roar of laughter had greeted the results of the immersion of Mistress Page and Mrs. Ford. They held up their fingers, rosy-tinted like those of Aurora.

"Oh! goodness gracious! will it never come off?"

"No, never!" said Captain Lymerton.
 "Such stains never do; but you may hide them in your gloves."

They were succeeded by sweet Ann Page, who came up with her head on one side, and a pretty simper, and held her fingers under the waters, spouting from the jaws of the lion. The clear moisture bubbled over her hand, and a deep voice from the interior

of the building announced that the lion had been, when alive, the companion and defender of Una, the chaste and fair, and was, therefore, a particularly good judge of those who submitted to the trial of his skill.

“Now, Miss Rivers,” said Captain Lymer-ton, “surely you will test the correctness of our friend the Lion?”

“You had better fetch your friend, Maid Marian,” said Eustace, smiling. “Her title is sufficient to prove her right to the honours of the fountain.”

“She will be here presently; but in the meantime, let me lead you to the magic stream, Miss Rivers. I am convinced that it will dance and bubble with clearer light over that very charming hand.”

Constance turned very pale, and drew back, but she saw Eustace looking at her wonderingly, and with a desperate effort

she stepped forward, and dashed her hand in the water, which had just before laved the slender fingers of Ann Page. A flood of the deepest crimson poured out, tinting her hands up to the wrist. Constance trembled so as to be scarcely able to stand, whilst Eustace exclaimed—

“What an infamous trick!—how dare you, sir?” turning to Lymerton.

“Bless me!—I’ve nothing to do with it. ’Tis but a joke, after all—a stupid one, no doubt; but no one can ever think it anything but a jest.”

Eustace looked round to see if he could resent it on anyone, but he saw that he could not without making both himself and Constance ridiculous. He drew her hand within his arm, and was walking away, when Zenobia came up, having heard, from the observations of the crowd, what had occurred.

“Never mind, my sweet gal!—Constance by name, and lily by nature!—whiter than any of the rest of ’em, I dare swear. Come along of me, my dear, and have your fortune told. I’ve been myself, and I do believe there’s something in it; and who knows but they may tell you of a nice young man I know of, whose name begins with a T, and not a He”—angry glance at Eustace. “Had you a-been along of me, you should not have been sent out a-nights in your chemise, to catch your death of cold, all for the sake of a big fellow—a six foot—who could have a-took care of himself. No, no—‘warm and comfortable’ is my motto at the willa. Glass of ‘hot with,’ jest afore to go to bed—not a bug in the ’ouse—no gandering about in the cold; and as for the matter of no fortin’, I don’t valler that. Mr. Mag has got plenty for both.”

Eustace looked aghast at the new claimant on Constance's attention ; but she, too conscious of the native kindness of heart in her vulgar friend to bear the idea of disregarding her under any circumstances, even the most mortifying to her own vanity, said she thanked her very much, and she would have her fortune told, if Mrs. Mag would show her where the oracle was to be consulted.

"I'll lead the way," said Zenobia ; and Eustace and Constance followed her to what had formerly been a hermitage, and was, from the thick foliage, the darkest and most secluded part of the grounds.

"Gentlemen have their fortunes told in the outside chamber," said Zenobia. "Now, sir, here's the words you must say, written down—'Speak, Great Wizard—I would know what futurity may show.'"

There was a moment's pause, and then a

clear female voice, which seemed to come from the air, chanted from above them the following answer :—

“ Knight unmatched in war’s alarms,
Glorious in thy deeds of arms,
Let thy brow fresh laurels wear,
Weave no myrtle for thy hair :
Shun love’s roses, for concealed
Thorns will wound the hearts that yield ;
Though the cypress lurk beneath,
Twined within the laurel wreath,
Better death in battle’s hour,
Than life disgraced by beauty’s power.”

“ A tiresome ditty,” said Queen Zenobia,
“ and not werry lively. Now, my dear,
go in there, and this gent and me’ll wait for
you ; and if they don’t promise you a good
husband, and a carriage and pair, my name’s
not Mag.”

She pulled back the dark curtain that concealed the inner recess, and Constance disappeared within its shadow. Some minutes elapsed in silence. Eustace did not like, and distrusted the performance ; but

Mrs. Mag continued, with many nods and winks, and finger on her lip, to sign to Eustace to have patience. When a quarter of an hour had elapsed, Eustace would wait no longer, and was passing the arms of Queen Zenobia, who extended her arm to bar his access to the interior of the building, when a stifled scream was heard within, and Eustace, thrusting aside the curtain, saw Constance fallen on the floor in a state of insensibility. To snatch up her prostrate form, and bear it to the daylight, was the work of an instant.

“Water! Salts!” he shouted to Mrs. Mag.

“Poor dear! poor dear! the good news has been too much for her. Lay her down, sir, on the grass, and I’ll give her just a drop. I always carry a flask of good brandy.”

Constance, who was reviving, put aside

the burning liquid, and, not to vex Mrs. Mag, she borrowed her bottle of salts. She raised herself from the ground, where they had laid her, and, looking at Eustace, said she was ashamed of having given so much trouble; and then, feeling how incongruous was the juxtaposition of Eustace and Mrs. Mag, she said she should like to walk towards that part of the grounds where the band was playing. Eustace dared not walk very fast, lest Constance should suffer from his anxiety to outstep his companion. Constance understood this, and walked faster than she could without damage to her tottering strength. Eustace longed to whisper loving speeches in her ear, but he dared not risk even the smallest word of consolation, with Mrs. Mag on the other side of Constance. The pace began to tell on the Queen, "who was fat and scant of breath." Eustace thought he would carry out his ad-

vantage, and began to question her thus :—

“Great Queen! was it true about Odenatus?”

“What was true?” puffed Mrs. Mag.

“About Odenatus? *You* know!”

“Is it a French dish? I’m sure I never seed it in my cookery-books, neither Glass nor Soyer.”

“Odenatus was a ‘goose’ you are said to have ‘cooked.’”

“Well! I’ve seen to the cooking of many a one at Michaelmas, but that is a breed I never hear of.”

“Gracious Queen! you beat the celebrated Queen of Hearts, who made some tarts, all on a summer day! Surely cooking geese is a much more worthy occupation than making pastry; but I spoke metaphorically, and Odenatus, fair Zenobia, was your husband, whose death you are supposed to have hastened. You see, there is nothing new

under the sun, only the poisoning has come down to the so-called *nobler* sex, and is chiefly confined to the medical profession in the reign of Queen Victoria."

"Lawks! don't tell me such stuff about Oudumhateus, I know nothing about him. I went to Mr. May, him as finds dresses for the theatres, says I, and I showed him my card from Sir Richard, says he—'Should it not be from Lady Levinge, mum?' 'Lawks!' says I, 'man and wife is one. But that's neither here nor there, Mr. May, but I want a dress, and I won't spare no expense to do the gent a credit!' 'Well,' says he, 'here's a beauty,' pointing to his book of costumes. 'I have one made like that; but, mind, no sham lace, no cotton velvets for me.' But, my dear, don't go so fast, and tell me, did the fortune-teller mention my Theophilus to be *the* man? Don't be shy, my dear, I won't say nothing to that stuck-up fellow the

other side. He's casting sheep's eyes himself at Miss Constance. Ah!" she continued, tenderly, on hearing Wieppert's band, in which, occasionally, the performers joined chorus with their voices. "Ah! *he* does sing beautiful. When he was said to be dying of the small-pox, and his poor face you'd never a-known, 'twas so covered. Some physic was wanton, so says I, I'll go quicker myself, and just as I was coming back along the street, one of them singers struck up 'The Dandy Dog's-meat Man.' He used to sing it so beautiful that I bust out a-crying, and I pulled sixpence out of my pus, and says I, 'Young man, shut up, if you don't wish to break my 'eart on the spot, and sing some other tune;' and he did, and by the time I git home the fever had took a turn, and my boy got well, though pox-marked he is—just a mite; but, lor! what signifies looks?"

Just then Sir Roger de Coverley came up, and seeing the dilemma of the young people, he proposed to Zenobia to take an ice, to which she gratefully acceded.

“I ain’t so young,” she said, “as I used to be, and walking so fast puts me all in a presperation and short in my breath—and I think the very blows is warm,” she added, turning her face to meet the warm summer air.

A raised platform of forty by twenty-five feet had been placed over the lawn, that the dancers might have the pleasure of *al fresco* exercise in their saltatory movements and the comfort of a floor combined. It was about two feet from the ground, and could be stepped on and off at pleasure. Seats were placed around for those who wished to watch the dancers, and on one of these, remote from the rest, and out of hearing, Eustace at length conducted Constance,

and determined that the real happiness of his life was about to dawn.

“Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven,
A spark of that immortal fire
With angels shared, by Allah given,
To lift from earth our low desire.”

He seated himself by her side, and thought how lovely she looked, though so pale and sad. He scarcely knew how to speak of his hopes, for he felt she had never encouraged any.

“Constance ! what agitated you ?—what made you faint ?—did the fortune-teller prognosticate evil ?”

Constance turned her scared looks towards him, and her lips formed the word “Yes,” though no sound proceeded from them.

“Constance, child !” exclaimed her lover, “how could you believe such nonsense ? Trust to me, Constance—entrust me with your happiness in the future, and leave to

me the task of insuring it. Do not turn away that sweet face—say you will be my wife. My mother loves you as her daughter—she wishes to claim you as one. Will you not speak, Constance?”

Constance was looking straight before her with starting eyes, and lips as white as ashes. The seeming cause of her abstraction and dismay was a young man in a Roman costume, representing Mark Antony, who advanced to the seat which she occupied with Eustace, saying—

“Fair Mistress Pamela, may I ask you to move through a dance with me? Probably you would prefer a minuet, but we have nothing but kitchen-dances on the boards at present, with which you may have been acquainted when you lived in the establishment of Squire B——.”

“This lady,” said Eustace, “is not disposed to dance.”

“Let the lady decide that,” said Mark Antony, with a sneer on his handsome face. “What would Squire B—— say if you refused? ‘Fool’s plaything’—‘painted bauble’—‘gewgaw,’ would be his terms of endearment; but not having the happiness to be your B, I aspire for the present to consider myself your A—your ‘curled Antony.’”

Eustace looked at Constance, but she did not glance towards him. Saint Cyr stood offering his arm to his companion. She said faintly,

“I cannot dance.”

“Ah! you underrate your powers; you can dance, or at any event you can walk—come, *Mistress Pamela!*”

Eustace was petrified to see Constance obey the insolent command, and, rising, take the arm he offered. She never invoked his aid; but rising hastily, he said in a whisper,

“Constance, say but a word, and I will knock him down! Surely you will not go with him?” Eustace was trembling with suppressed passion.

Saint Cyr heard somewhat of the suggestion, and surmised the rest. He dropped his arm, thereby releasing that of Constance’s, and said,

“I use no coercion, Miss Rivers; stay or go, as you please—the choice is before you. You are doing duty as a female Hercules; that gentleman, no doubt, from all I hear of him, is Virtue;” and he bowed sarcastically to Eustace. “I represent Pleasure—Pleasure has it, of course,” he added, laughing, as Constance placed her arm within his, which he gave her the mortification of leaving unbent for an instant, as if he doubted whether he would accept it.

As Saint Cyr walked off with Constance, he cast a glance of laughing triumph over

his shoulder at Eustace, and evidently pressed Constance's slender arm to his side.

Eustace could scarcely repress the impulse to rush at him and strangle him, as he had once strangled a Sepoy who attacked him and shot his horse, when he was unarmed. His thumb tightened against his fore-fingers, as they had done on the throat of his slender but wiry foe; and he committed murder in his heart now, as he had then slain a Sepoy in self-defence.

But Constance had sanctioned the man's insolence. He watched her and her companion step on to the platform, where Sir Roger de Coverley was leading off the dance which bears his name; and the bow and curtsy were interchanged between him and his charming widow, as they met in the centre of the long line of dancers.

The lively music, the gay colours and quaint costumes of the constantly moving

crowds, irritated Eustace. He longed for solitude, but felt as if he *must* remain where Constance was. He believed that he saw glimpses of her black silk dress and the orange satin toga of her companion through the crowd of dancers on the opposite side of the platform. Suddenly they disappeared. She had left the crowd to walk with Saint Cyr into the secluded avenues. Eustace determined to follow them; not all his just anger at Constance's inexplicable conduct could induce him to disregard her welfare. It was a work of time to thread the crowd which surrounded the platform, engaged in looking at the dancers; and whither could he go where he was free from their pressure? Long stately avenues led to different parts of the grounds, and narrow footpaths, shaded with odorous shrubs and brilliant flowers, concealed those who stepped within their seclusion, a few paces after they had entered

them. Through one of them he wandered listlessly, but found he was only one of a crowd whose footsteps he had unwittingly followed. Perhaps Constance and her companion may have passed onwards. He followed, and came to a small building in the Turkish style. At the entrance there were many of the guests seated on the steps which led to the peristyle. At the door, and framed as it were by its gilded tinsel, sat Lady Levinge, with a harp in her hand. She had changed her dress to a loose Eastern robe, intended to represent the character of the Namouna, in the "Light of the Harem." She had been singing, and had just concluded her song when Eustace came in sight; and the crowd, who delighted in the wonderful power and sweetness of her notes, were entreating her to favour them with something else. She seemed to be surrounded by an atmosphere of perfumes, from the rich as-

semblage of hot-house flowers which were placed before and around her ; they made a gorgeous background for her figure, which was arrayed in soft silks and filmy gauzes. She caught sight of Eustace, and her cheeks glowed and her eyes beamed softened fires, as she preluded on her harp for a moment, and then sung the following stanzas, with enunciation so clear and distinct that the listeners heard every word, and understood every inflection of her voice ; whilst a quick glance at Eustace, suddenly withdrawn, told to him, and to him alone, its meaning :—

“ Do I not love ? Thy name, the first and last
I kneeling utter ere I seek my rest ;
And pray that Heaven’s protection may be cast
Around thee, and thy future hours be blest.

Do I not love ? I would not have thee deem
How fondly, fervently thou’rt loved by me,
Nor guess the restless, long-extended dream,
Fraught by no images but those of thee.

Do I not love ? How gloomy seems the day
When dawning memory resumes its power—

How sadly then I from its light away,
If hope to meet thee brightens not that hour !

My first fond woman's love to thee is given—
I dare not own its passionate excess ;
To veil the truth if woman's pride has striven,
Could not thy heart the glowing secret guess ?”

As the sounds died away in silence, the listeners drew a long breath of relief; the tones of the voice had been exquisite, and the accompaniment on the harp skilful, but the intense passion expressed in the words and look of Lady Levinge had disturbed the quiet current of social life. They could not separate the songstress from the song, and “no one addresses the expression of such violent feelings to one's husband, you know,” whispered one mature matron to another.

“Beautiful words !—beautifully sung, my lady !” said an old gentleman, dressed as Will Honeycomb, “and happy the man to whom they may be addressed !”

Lady Levinge looked down demurely, as a cat detected in eating cream.

“They are some I addressed to Sir Richard, after our engagement, and before I married.”

And there was a long Oh-h-h ! from the company ; they were satisfied with the explanation—all but Eustace, who did not believe in it. He had leaned against one of the pillars of the peristyle ; the abundant branches of clematis concealed his glowing face. It was not in man’s nature to listen to the out-pourings of a love so passionate and devoted from a beautiful woman, and not feel his breast fluttered into an unusual degree of emotion.

Coralie contrasted favourably with Constance, who, though she had hazarded her life to save him, for some reason which now seemed inexplicable, probably for the sake of Lady Yorke, yet refrained from showing

any mark of preference, and had left him at the first invitation of another man. Again Lady Levinge was pressed to sing, and this time she sang “*Il Segreto*.” The guests were more impressed and less shocked by this, as it was Italian. Other songs succeeded—some English, some foreign, and Eustace lingered still, entranced by the exquisite tones of Coralie’s voice. He had not forgotten Constance, but where could he seek her, when every step he took might carry him in an opposite direction.

In the meantime, the last rays of a glorious autumn sun tinted the summits of the clustered elms with burnished gold, and shot long slanting lines of light on their giant trunks. Eustace moved from his place, intending to seek his mother, knowing she would be impatient to reach home, yet unwilling to tell her of Constance’s delinquencies. The movement was per-

ceived by Lady Levinge, who touched her harp to a lighter strain, and sang the following words :—

“ Bright day is dying,
Sweet hours are flying,
Linger awhile in the spell of my might ;
Blossoms are paling,
Perfumes exhaling,
Pluck the frail blooms to adorn thee to-night.

“ Bright hours are fleeting,
When, again meeting,
Shall fate a bevy so brilliant unite ?
Dark clouds of sorrow
Dim thy to-morrow—
Linger awhile in my bower of delight.”

This was rapturously encored, for the guests felt that the lines were *improvised* expressly for them. Lady Levinge sung it again, but as she came to the fourth line of the second verse, Eustace felt his arm touched timidly, and turning suddenly, he saw the white, scared face of Constance, looking an impersonation of the “sorrow” predicted by the enchantress. She whispered—

“Take me to Lady Yorke—I want to go home.”

Eustace placed her hand within his arm, and walked in the direction towards the house. He was deeply displeased, and kept silence, though he longed to ask for an explanation of conduct so extraordinary and seemingly ill-bred. Constance seemed disposed to give none. When they reached the house, he sent an attendant for his mother’s carriage, and placing Constance in it, he was turning away to seek Lady Yorke, but before he did so, he gave Constance one look.

“Constance, where is the necklace I gave you?”

Constance was silent.

“Have you lost it?”

No answer.

“Have you given it away?”

“No—not quite.”

“Not quite! Half given, half allowed it to be taken, eh?” said Eustace, speaking deliberately, from suppressed rage. “You value my love-gift as highly as my love, seemingly. You never loved me, Constance!”

“I never said I did,” said Constance, bursting into a passion of sobs and tears.

“Enough, madam,” said Eustace, in a towering rage. “I will trouble you no longer with any expression of unreturned attachment.”

He composed his quivering lips as well as he could, and sought his mother, whom he found in the library, turning over volumes of valuable engravings.

“My mother, Miss Rivers seems tired and ill, will you take her home? I will take you to the carriage—she is in it. I shall not return home yet. I must make your apologies to Lady Levinge. The Gra-

hams will drop me at Elm Hall on their way, so you need not fear for my conveyance," he said, trying to smile. "They may be late—probably will be so—therefore don't worry if I am not home before eleven."

He handed her into the carriage, when he had tenderly enveloped her in her shawl, and turned away without one look at her companion. He would think as little as possible of Constance, he determined; indeed, at the moment, there was no feeling of love in his breast towards her. He was too angry.

CHAPTER II.

“When the heart is still agitated by the remains of a passion, we are more ready to receive a new one than when we are entirely cured.”

LA ROCHEFOUCAULT.

AS Eustace returned through the grounds he saw many symptoms that the hospitality of the host, carried to excess, had had its usual effects. The laughter was uproarious, the dancing fast degenerating into a romp. Maid Marion, forgetful of her assumed character, had seized “the widow,” and was whirling her round in the quickest of vales. Sir Richard himself had pledged his guests with old-fashioned hospitality, till he moved about in the character of Mrs. Gamp in “a walking swoon.” Sir Roger de Coverley and

Queen Zenobia were discussing devilled chicken and champagne on a little table out of doors, prepared for their particular delectation. She had been asking him whether he had indeed “made up” that dance called by his name himself, and he assured her that he had, and that Queen Ann had danced it with him at a State Ball—an assertion which, in the muddled condition of Mrs. Mag’s brain, excited neither surprise nor incredulity.

Eustace passed them unperceived. The sun was set, and twilight seemed to come on more suddenly than usual, aided by some gathering clouds in the western horizon. Most of the guests now hastened their departure, lest a storm should overtake them ere they reached their homes. The paths were deserted, and the roll of carriages indicated the numbers of those who were leaving Earlscliff. Eustace was relieved by

the solitude. He wanted to pause and consider his position, yet he raged too violently against Constance to be able to judge with deliberation. He wandered on, too absorbed to see whither the path led, till he found himself in the one which he had before passed over, which terminated in the Turkish temple of the enchantress. It was deserted now. Not a single worshipper remained in the solitary twilight of that brilliant day to bestow incense on the fair creature who had commanded their admiration by her wonderful gifts of song. The presiding deity herself had vanished. Eustace was glad to find a place of repose, and a shelter from the big drops which fell, accompanied occasionally by the distant growl of the thunder and vivid flashes of lightning. He sat down on a couch, and felt relieved by the sense of silence and solitude. The room was octagonal, and there were panels

in each compartment. The vibration of a louder peal of thunder made one of these swing open, and Eustace arose to shut it, thinking it was only a cupboard, but finding within a staircase, he ascended it carefully and silently, and a blast of wind closed the door after him with a catch which could be opened only on the inside.

“At any event, I am safe from intrusion, and may enjoy my repose so long as I please,” said Eustace.

The thick carpet on which he trod betrayed not his footsteps, and he advanced into the centre of the upper room, which was fitted up as a boudoir, with every adornment luxury could furnish. Heavy curtains, pendulous from the windows, excluded the small remains of light, rich sofas surrounded the room. On a table, in a silver wine-cooler, stood a bottle of champagne in ice, and a goblet was at its side, and Eustace,

weary and parched by his anger, filled it with the sparkling wine, and drained it at once.

As he set it on the table again, he heard a slight sound, like a sob proceeding from one of the sofas in the recess. He advanced, and there, with her face buried in the pillows, her beautiful arms extended in utter hopelessness, and her hair falling in disorder over her white shoulders, lay the enchantress.

Eustace remembered nothing in that moment, except the passionate love which she had lately breathed in her song for him.

Constance, his mother—his anger and disappointment were forgotten. The wine tingled along his veins, quickening his pulse, and flashing his handsome face. He advanced stealthily towards her, lest his approach should startle the beautiful mourner.

But where is the woman who, without hearing, sight, or touch, does not become conscious of the presence of her lover? Coralie knew, in the midst of her passion of sobs, that Eustace was approaching the building. Her heart throbbed violently as she heard him ascend the stairs. She quivered throughout her glowing frame, as he placed his arms round her, and raised her from her recumbent position.

“Mamouna! enchantress!” whispered Eustace. He had never ventured to call her Coralie, and he could not, he felt, at such a moment, address her by her married name. “Mamouna! Why these tears? Why these convulsive sobs?”

He was supporting her, and her face rested on the cluster of medals which covered his left breast. He lifted her head tenderly, and interposed between him and her glowing cheek some of the flowing silk drapery

depending from her arm. His voice was low and earnest.

“What can grieve you? You who have all that youth and talent, beauty and wealth, can give?”

“I have not the dearest of treasures—love.”

“Are you quite sure you have not?” said Eustace, his voice sinking to a whisper. “Tell me why you grieved?”

“You gave the necklace I gave to you to that foolish girl.”

“Is it possible that *I* can have made those precious tears to flow?” And he kissed the eyelids still wet with them.

A frightful peal of thunder now seemed bursting over the top of the building. Coralie, terrified, flung her arms round the neck of Eustace, and clung to him convulsively. His lips murmured words of consolation, till they were silenced by meeting hers,

half-open in breathless emotion, where terror contended with passion. Their pure respiration mingled. The kisses he gave her had never been bestowed on purchased lips.

“Tell me that you love me?” she said, and his arms were wreathed round her yielding waist, unconfined by any bondage more stringent than the loose silk robe and cambric vest.

The question recalled Eustace to his better self. He had never framed his lips to falsehood, even to a lovely woman. He dared not dignify the passion which burned in his breast with the name of love. What right had he to her kisses? What title to caress the soft yielding form that clung to his embrace if he did not love her?

“Am I a man, or a brute!” he exclaimed, placing her gently on the sofa, and sinking on his knees at her feet. “Forgive me, oh!

forgive me ! most lovely of women ! I shall not soon win pardon from myself for this night's madness !”

He disengaged himself, and rushed to the door ; but turning, he saw her fling herself down on the cushions in a fresh burst of grief, and, overwhelmed by conflicting feelings, he came back, and catching her once more in his arms, covered her brow, eyelids, and lips with kisses, and bade her farewell.

The storm that raged without was nothing to that which agitated the breast of Eustace. He rushed out through the lightning and thunder, and felt the rain pouring in torrents on his bare head. The chill of the tempest was grateful to his fevered frame. He must get to the house as soon as possible, and send servants with cloaks and umbrellas to Lady Levinge. The image presented to his memory and imagination of her as he had left her, made the temptation to return

to the Turkish Temple too great. He longed to know she was safely surrounded by her own people.

He hurried on, and found some of the servants huddled together from the storm in one of the outbuildings, and these he directed to seek Lady Levinge with wraps—"by her order," as he said; and then entering the house, he sought her maid, and directed her, as from her lady, to prepare dry clothes for her, and to attend to her comfort when she came in.

Suddenly a terrible thought possessed him. How terror-stricken she had been at the vivid flashes of lightning and rolling thunder, and he had left her to suffer alone! He had left her exposed, as he thought, to danger, because he had selfishly fled from the temptation of her presence.

This fresh view of his own conduct distracted him. What could be her feelings,

left alone in that solitary building, a prey to terrors which have in themselves inflicted death without the aid of the lightning-stroke? He ran to the stable to order her horse to be saddled. The grooms were enjoying the usual saturnalia at the conclusion of a feast, and not one was within hearing of his call. He went to the harness-room, and then saddled Lady Levinge's favourite pony; and taking his military cloak, he sprung on the side-saddle, and galloped towards the building.

“If anything should have happened!” he went on saying to himself—“if she should have been struck dead! Good heavens! I should never forgive myself!”

He pressed the pony forward, with one arm raised to protect his face from the branches of blossoms heavy with rain, which closed in arches over his pathway. At length he reached the Temple, and fasten-

ing the pony to a tree, he sprung up the steps. It was dark, and the profound silence sent a chill to his heart. He felt for the door—it was half open, as he had left it. Eustace was at all times a nervous man, and his apprehension was now wrought to agony. He wailed out the name, “Coralie!—Lady Levinge!” feeling about with outstretched arms for the sofa. Then his hands encountered her body, extended and seemingly lifeless.

He took her up, and came down the stairs staggering under her weight, which at another time would have been to him but as a feather, and took her to the open air. There was not much daylight left, but Eustace could feel the pulsation returning in her heart, and the interrupted breath emitted from her lips.

“Thank heaven!” he cried, “I have not this on my conscience! Coralie, my dar-

ling—speak—tell me you are recovering? ”

She placed her arms round his neck.

“I thought you had left me to die alone,” she whispered.

“See, here is your pony, Pasta. Do you think you can sit up? I have brought my cloak to cover you ;” and Eustace enveloped her carefully, and seated her on the horse, which he led slowly, keeping off the wet branches as well as he might. They moved on in silence. Lady Levinge was too much exhausted to do more than utter piteous sighs occasionally ; and Eustace felt that nothing he could say would avail.

They reached the house just as the scared servants were coming out to look for them ; and Eustace deposited Lady Levinge at a side-door into the arms of her maid.

CHAPTER III.

“ Skill'd by a touch to deepen scandal's tints,
 With all the kind mendacity of hints ;
 While mingling truth with falsehood, sneers with smiles,
 A thread of candour with a web of wiles.

* * * * *

A lip of lies, a face formed to conceal,
 And, without feeling, mock at all who feel.”

EUSTACE then went round to the grand entrance, and made his way to where he heard voices of the guests engaged at the billiard-table. Mrs. Gamp, still arrayed in the dress of that respected party, was sleeping peacefully in an easy chair. Her cap was twisted awry, showing the capricious whiskers of Sir Richard, who, without thinking of the decencies of the female department, had drawn one leg over the knee of the

other, and presented an appearance most unparalleled in the annals of decent life. It was impossible to regard him seriously, and Eustace smiled faintly at his aspect; whilst a congratulatory thought passed through his mind.

“I am thankful I can shake hands with him when he awakes, without remorse.”

“Old fellow!” said young Graham, on seeing him, “my gov is gone home, and said I was to take you in the dog-cart, as you were not in the way when the carriage started; if you will wait till I have finished this game of billiards, we will go. I think the rain must be over by this time.”

“All right,” said Eustace; and he sat down, glad to be quiet after the fatigues of the day.

The other gentlemen in the room were Saint Cyr and Captain Lymerton—the former was playing against Graham. Pre-

sently Saint Cyr took a necklace from his pocket, and, walking over to the unconscious Mrs. Gamp, began to fasten it round her neck. Sir Richard grunted at having his head moved to pass the ornament round the back of it.

“Halloa!” said Graham, “how came you by that necklace? I thought Yorke had won it at the archery match.”

“Sir Eustace Yorke no doubt carries off every prize in war, both real and mimic; but he is not—awh!—always—awh!—so successful in love,” and Saint Cyr put on a look of exquisite self-conceit, and twisted a well-shaped moustache.

Sir Eustace had undergone so many varied emotions since he had placed Constance in his mother’s carriage, that it seemed to him that a week had elapsed since the occurrence referred to had taken place. He saw that Saint Cyr meant to be insolent, and prepared

for the encounter by calling up all his self-command.

“You cannot expect me to misunderstand your allusion to a young lady who came here under the protection of my mother, Lady Yorke?”

Eustace spoke in a voice so calm, and with accents so deliberate, that a foreigner might have imagined he was complimenting the gentleman he thus addressed. He continued—

“Am I to imagine, in the reference to love, that you allude to any which you possess towards that young lady?”

“Really, my dear Yorke, you should not cross-question a fellow so.”

“Pray, Mr. Saint Cyr, how did you possess yourself of that necklace?—did Miss Rivers present it to you?”

“You’re damned curious, Yorke!—I can’t say that she took it off and presented

it to me—she preferred that my fingers should become acquainted with her pretty throat ; but she stood still, like the servant girl mentioned in the *Spectator*, who waited to see ‘how far the fellow’s impudence would carry him.’”

Eustace longed to knock him down, but he remembered that Constance had said that she had “not quite” given him the necklace ; and her making no resistance to his possessing himself of it seemed to confirm his and her account of the transaction.

“They say, my dear fella,” continued Saint Cyr, drawling, “that that most respectable lady, your mother, wishes to marry you to that girl. Sweetly pretty, certainly ; but there are several old proverbs worthy of all acceptation. ‘Look before you leap,’ and ‘Marry in haste, and repent at leisure.’ Keep both in your mind, if you value a friend’s advice. You see,

I've no doubt you're up to all the dodges of those oleaginous copper-coloured women in India, but you're young to the stratagems of *our* fair enslavers."

"If, sir, you mean to throw any reflection on a lady whose society is shared by my mother, you must be prepared to answer for it to me in the way all gentlemen understand."

"See here," said Saint Cyr, turning to Lymerton and Graham, "this fine fire-eater wants to blow out my brains for trying to enlighten his. I really do not think so good-natured a hint deserves such a return. However, I never refuse such an invitation."

"Really, Yorke," interposed Lymerton, "I think you are wrong. Besides, to bring a young lady's name into such a discussion must damage her extremely, whatever should be the result of your meeting,

should it take place. Don't be so very Quixotic."

"Mr. Saint Cyr," said Eustace, with increased rage, and increased deliberation, "will you withdraw all the insinuations and inuendoes to which you have given utterance against Miss Rivers since I have been in the room, or will you not?"

"Certainly *not*!" said Saint Cyr; "and I have as many more as I please to utter at the service of you and the rest of the company; but I don't quite see how 'the effusion of blood,' as the penny-a-liners have it, either of yours or mine, can wash a Blackamoor white, though perhaps you will like to take the lady *red-handed*, as the Scots say."

"I believe that the step I am about to take will have the effect of stopping the mouths of coxcombs like yourself when they desire to run down an innocent girl.

Graham, will you be my friend on this occasion?"

They walked together into the library, which was empty.

"My dear fellow," suggested Graham, "duelling is so very much gone out—it really is a custom fitted only for the barbarous ages."

"That is true," replied Eustace, sadly; "but it seems to me that there must be some check given to verbal insolence and conversational detraction. What reparation can be made to an innocent woman, if her name be at the mercy of every scoundrel who chooses to malign it, if duelling be done away with? Looks, shrugs, half-uttered hints, are not actionable in a court of law; and if they were, the remedy would be worse than the offence, and the woman a greater sufferer from the miserable publicity given to her name. It is well

for her if she have a brother, or a friend who is willing to use the only available weapon in her defence, feeble and inefficient though it be."

Graham left him to seek Captain Lymerton, and make arrangements for what seemed inevitable. Eustace had said—

"If it were done, 'twere well it were done quickly."

Captain Lymerton felt that Saint Cyr must retract his sarcasms against Miss Rivers, or fight. Saint Cyr had never been in action—*his* breast was not literally bristling with decorations. Eustace might have refused to fight, but Saint Cyr could not—at least, in the code of honour to which Graham and Lymerton adhered.

When Graham drove Eustace home in his dog-cart, he told the latter that they had arranged a meeting at Boulogne on the day after the morrow, at six in the morning.

Eustace and Graham were to start at 2 A.M. on the following day, which would enable them to reach their destination in time to give them a quiet night's repose before the business of the day began.

When Eustace reached home it was nearly midnight, and Lady Yorke had been watching for him since eleven o'clock, with her usual anxiety. Constance had retired when she had heard by the wheels of the dog-cart that Eustace was close at hand; and his mother was alone when Eustace, pale and preoccupied, entered the room.

"What is it?" said his mother; so legibly was something unusual written on his countenance.

"Mother, I must leave you at 2 A.M. to-morrow."

"For what purpose?"

"To fight a duel;" and he advanced and kissed her brow gravely and tenderly.

Lady Yorke became colourless, even to her lips.

“I suppose it is inevitable, Eustace?”

“Yes, of course. I am not a duellist, as a rule.”

“With whom?”

“Mr. Saint Cyr.”

“What is the cause?”

“He spoke of Miss Rivers in a way I could not allow any one to speak of a lady who was associated with you, without insisting on an apology or a hostile meeting.”

“Poor Constance!”

“Poor Constance!” reiterated Eustace with impatience. “What is it, my mother, that there is wrong about that girl? Why does she act in such a way as to provoke animadversion?”

And he told Lady Yorke how Constance had left his side at an invitation, which amounted almost to a command, from Saint

Cyr, and of her admission that she had parted with the prize necklace which Eustace had placed round her neck, to him.

“I never knew an innocent girl if Constance be not one,” replied Lady Yorke.

“Does she speak ever of her early life to you, mother?—does she converse freely about past circumstances connected with her residence in Cornwall?”

Lady Yorke was silent.

“No-o-o, she does not say much. I can only gather that she was devoted to her foster-mother, who had a lingering illness, terminated by death; and Constance weeps when she speaks of her, and I do not encourage her to talk on the subject.”

“Mother, I believe that you are too pure and high-minded yourself to suspect disgrace in others. I wish she would give some explanation of her conduct before I hazard my life in consequence of it. I must fight,

either way, my dear mother; but I have seen life taken so often, that I am by no means eager for the encounter—no man is—though he does his duty. I wish I knew she were innocent of impropriety—I should go with a stouter heart if I believed myself to be a champion for the right.”

Lady Yorke rang the bell.

“Tell Miss Rivers that I should be obliged by her returning to the drawing-room at once.”

In a few moments Constance re-appeared; her eyelids were weighed down by weeping, her face pale, her gait tremulous. She seemed to Eustace to look like a youthful Parisina brought to the judgment-seat.

“Constance,” said Lady Yorke, whilst Eustace placed a chair for her opposite his mother—“Constance,” trying to steady a faltering voice; she scarcely knew how to begin her questions, yet time pressed—

“Constance, is there anything in your past life you are ashamed of?”

No answer.

“Has Mr. Saint Cyr any claim, either from past or present love between you, to take you away from the protection of my son, with whom I left you?”

“No.”

“Why, then, did you go with him, and remain absent some time in his company?”

“I left him as soon as I could get away.”

“Why did you give him the necklace?”

“He took it from my neck. I begged him not to do so.”

“Are there any circumstances in your early life of which he has become cognizant which you would conceal?”

No answer.

“Oh! Constance! Constance, I have

thought you worthy of being the wife of Eustace, and now——”

“Stop, Lady Yorke! your kindness to me has been unbounded, and for that reason I have listened to, and replied to many of the questions to which I have been subjected by you; but do me this justice. *You* sought *me* first. The cries I uttered in the railway-carriage gave me a claim for aid from anyone within hearing—gentlemen or railway-porters. I knew not your son, when he came to my assistance; I did not call *him*, particularly. During the time when I have been made so happy by your society, I defy you or Sir Eustace to say that I ever gave him any indication that he was more to me than a gentleman who had had the good fortune to be your son. If there be a mystery in my unhappy life, no one has a right to bare it to the light. I thank you for your hospitality. To-morrow I will return

to my father, and ask him to take me in."

"You shall go, Constance; but you have been an ill-omened guest to me. My son leaves me to-night to fight a duel with a man who reflected on your character."

She did not proceed, for Constance, throwing her straightened arms above her head, and twisting her fingers convulsively, fell forward heavily on the floor. Both mother and son exchanged looks as they at the same moment stooped to lift her from the ground. The shock had been too great for nerves so hardly tried during the preceding day. They bore her to her room, and Lady Yorke directed Watson to place her feet in hot water, and bathe her head with iced cloths. Eustace looked at her with profound commiseration, yet there was a shadow of provocation mixed with it.

"The second woman I have had to carry about insensible to-night. They are be-

witched, I believe ! Thank heaven ! my mother is not given to hysterics, or convulsions, or fainting fits."

Eustace felt that "she should have swooned hereafter;" he was so busy now. He must read over his will again, and try to gain an hour's sleep before he started. Anglo-Indians are, as a rule, careful of their health, and Eustace felt his brain must rest if he were to act with a due amount both of deliberation and promptitude in the work in which he was about to engage.

He looked over his will, and added a codicil of a few bequests, and then found he had nearly an hour for sleep.

"Mother ! you will, I know, sit by my side, and awake me at a quarter to two."

"Have you a pair of good duelling pistols?" said his mother.

"No, Graham lends me a pair."

“Can I pack anything for you?”

“Kali Khan will do that.”

“Now, then, sleep as soon as you can.”

So Eustace lay down in a dressing-gown and slept peacefully, and his mother, hushed in patient agony, watched by him.

CHAPTER IV.

“ And she bent o’er him, as he lay beneath,
Hushed as the babe upon his mother’s breast,
Drooped as the willow when no winds can breathe,
Lull’d like the deep of ocean when at rest.”

BYRON.

EUSTACE knew his mother’s character, when he had told her without reserve of his intentions. He knew her masculine turn of mind would never admit for an instant the feminine instinct of terror which would have induced a weaker woman to call in civil aid to prevent the meeting. If Eustace thought it necessary to fight, he must do so, but her agony was none the less. Since the death of her husband Eustace had been to her what the light and

warmth of the sun is to the creation ; and now in a few hours he might be dead, all her hopes extinguished, every happiness blotted out of her life by unutterable darkness and despair. She looked at the noble head lying so happily unconscious, and remembered the thin halo of golden curls that had surrounded it in infancy, when it had rested on her arm. Then her husband had shared her pride and joy in their darling ; but he had departed, and Eustace was her all. She felt she could better have spared him had he fallen in honourable strife in the front of the battle, storming the Redan ; but to die thus, opposed to a man whose conduct and character were at the best but doubtful—it seemed a degradation to Eustace to be engaged in such a contest. She knew Eustace would not be content with “a sham fight,” an exchange of shots, and an expression of being “satisfied.” One or

the other would be carried from the field wounded or dead.

Time flew onward. She must awaken him now. And he awoke with a smile of vacant wonder at finding himself lying on a sofa, with his mother looking at him—that look so painful to those who have watched the happy sleep of persons who must awake to misery which they have for a brief time forgotten.

“Time, is it?” he said, rising at once to a full recollection of all the circumstances; for there was his desk, and the will, of the codicil of which he had left the parchment unfolded, that the signatures might dry—his watch, on which his mother’s eyes had been fixed, and the candles burnt low in their sockets. “Mother, give me a cup of tea.”

He knew she would feel less wretched if occupied. He drank the tea, listening for a moment, and hearing, before even Lady

Yorke, the distant grating of the carriage wheels over the gravel.

“God bless you, my mother!” kissing her wan cheek.

“You will telegraph, Eustace?”

“Yes, the news shall be telegraphed to you, whatever be the result. But keep up your spirits—I feel sure *I* shall telegraph,” and he smiled faintly, and ran down to the carriage. He looked back as he reached the door.

“Portmanteau in?”

Kali Khan salaamed.

He saw his mother's tall figure in black, with a face of intense love and suffering, holding a candle to light the group; and then he passed away from her sight into the darkness. He was to call for Graham, and take him up.

In the few miles that intervened, he was glad to be alone, to try and think. The

image of Lady Levinge, as he had seen her in the Turkish temple, seemed indelibly impressed on his memory. Alas ! for man's inconstancy !—he thought of her with greater tenderness than of Constance. Lady Levinge's passionate song rang in his ears—the love she had expressed both in words and caresses—the sacrifices she would, he was assured, have made for him, contrasted with Constance's assertion that he had never been to her more than the son of her hostess ; and it was Constance who had brought this unpleasantness on him. Constance had brought on him the hazard, perhaps the loss, of his life in an unworthy cause. Yet his sense of justice suggested the efforts she had made to save his life from an assassin. He could not understand why she had done so. He would not think of it if he could help it—they would be even now, for he might fall in avenging an in-

sult offered to her. Then came the thought of death, and he was thankful that he had not burthened his conscience with a great sin—thankful that Coralie might remember him with less of shame mingled with her pain. Before Graham joined him in the carriage, and they had reached the terminus, Eustace had regained his usual equanimity.

When Lady Yorke was standing with her eyes fixed on the door which had shut out her last view of Eustace, she felt a hand on her arm, and, turning, she saw the deathlike face of Constance, saying in a whisper,

“Cannot you stop him?—pray let me go after him!—send to some magistrate!—let him be put under arrest!—I’m sure I have heard of such things!”

“No, Constance,” replied the mother, sadly, “it cannot be done.”

“ Oh ! it can !—I’m sure it can !” reiterated the girl, impatiently ; “ let us try !—do let us go somewhere !”

“ My dear, if by walking across this room I could interfere with Eustace’s design, I should sit still.”

“ You are hard and cruel !—you don’t love him !—you don’t love him as I do ! Pray—pray let me go and call for help !” and she flung herself down, her hair flowing over her night-dress, embracing Lady Yorke’s knees as she sat.

“ Had you shown your love in a different way, Constance, he need not have challenged Mr. Saint Cyr ; but ’tis useless talking of that now—you had better return to your bed. Go, poor girl !—I will sit by you for a little time, till you fall asleep.”

“ I must go home,” said Constance ; “ I have brought misery to you who have treated me so kindly—I will get ready to go

so soon as it's light, if you will let me have the carriage as far as the railway."

"Be still, Constance—you *cannot* go for a week or so ; and during that week I must take you about with me, that the little world around us may see that we are still together, after all that has been said and done. Above all, we must leave our cards on Lady Levinge."

Constance felt this as a reprieve, miserable as she was, for it would have been worse to have returned to her father's house, and be left in ignorance of what had befallen Eustace, so she was silent till Lady Yorke began again.

"You hazarded your life to save my son—you have said within the last few minutes that *my* love—his mother's love—is little compared with that which you feel for him. Constance, what does this mean?—why do you walk away with another man, and

allow him to take from you my son's gift? Why do you make it your boast that you have never given Eustace any encouragement to express the love towards you which you feel, you say, for him? I repeat, what have you done that you conceal?—are you ashamed of any transaction in your past life of which Mr. Saint Cyr is cognizant?”

“Oh!” wailed out Constance, “pray do not ask me—I am so very, very wretched! Do not think worse of me than you can help. Perhaps one day you may know all—if you do, think of what I suffer now, and pity me.”

Lady Yorke said no more, but though she led Constance kindly to her bed-room, she was dissatisfied and vexed by her refusal.

“She might confide in me,” was her thought,—“unless, indeed, she be guilty in

a woman's acceptance of her word, and is fearful of Mr. Saint Cyr's betraying his knowledge of the fact. How wise and sweet and innocent she seems, too! I could have put up with her better than any girl I ever met as the wife of Eustace."

Constance lay quiet in her bed and wept, when Lady Yorke retired to hers. Both knew that two whole days must elapse before the telegraph could tell them the result of the meeting. There was nothing left but to be patient.

Lady Yorke regretted she had not gone to Dover, to be as near as possible, should Eustace be wounded and require her care. But the idea had not occurred to her till it was too late to consult him, and she should, if she started now, miss the telegram which might assure her of his safety.

CHAPTER V.

“How happy is that balm to wretches—sleep !
No cares perplex them for their future state—
Unruly love is this way lulled to rest,
And injured honour, when redress is lost,
Is no way solved but this.”

CONSTANCE'S reflections, as she lay in her bed, and let her sleepless eyes wander round the room, were overwhelming. She felt like a criminal. There was the pretty Pamela dress she had worn the preceding day—there was the case that had contained the fatal necklace. How beautiful the gems had looked, reposing on the dark crimson velvet ! She had placed the case in her pocket, when Eustace had clasped the ornament round her neck. She was

young, and with the usual love of ornament which distinguishes her sex ; and this was the first gift of the kind she had ever received. So we must forgive poor Constance, if a few of her tears were to be set down to the account of the necklace, which had been, besides its intrinsic beauty, the gift of the only man she had ever loved. So she sobbed and wept herself to sleep.

The ladies were late when they met at the breakfast-table that morning. Little was said by either, and but little food partaken of ; but Lady Yorke compelled herself to attend to her usual occupations, whilst Constance had not the resource of her domestic duties. She wandered about the house, looking out listlessly first from one window, and then from another, without hope or object.

At length came the hour of luncheon, and Lady Yorke ordered the carriage to

take them to Earlscliff. It was most unlikely that Lady Levinge should see them in all the confusion and fatigue which follows a gala day ; but some hours of listless time would be got through in the carriage, and they could leave their cards on the lady of the house.

As the footman rang at the bell, Sir Richard appeared, fresh-looking and cheerful, and quite unlike a man who contemplated paying some hundreds for a bygone amusement. In the first place, he could afford it ; in the second, his dress and impersonation of character had been a great success ; and when he saw Lady Yorke and Pamela, he was glad, and expected the compliment on the yesterday's successes, which Lady Yorke willingly gave him.

“ Yes, I was considered rather good as Mrs. Gamp,” he said smiling ; “ and in keeping up my character, I fear I went rather

too often to the tea-pot. Whilst in the placid contentment which sometimes results from such a state, I fear, Mistress Pamela, that I must have purloined, or picked up, or possessed myself in some way of the prize necklace which I saw round your fair neck. I declare I have not the slightest idea how it came round *my* neck; but I cannot do better than return it to its rightful owner," and he pulled from his waistcoat pocket the graceful ornament, with an indifference in his handling it which made Constance shudder.

"Oh! Sir Richard, I am so *much* obliged to you! I am so glad to get it again!"

And she extended her hand trembling with eagerness, in which he placed it, and said, with a Gampish air, that he wished the "sweet creeter 'ealth to wear it hout."

"I fear it is vain to expect to see Lady Levinge?" said Lady Yorke.

“Coralie is too much tired to leave her room to-day,” replied Sir Richard. “We lost some of our guests early this morning—Mr. Saint Cyr and Captain Lymerton left us for France, I fancy. I hear something of their intending to make a tour of the Continent.”

Lady Yorke began hastily—

“I hope your beautiful grounds have not suffered much in consequence of your hospitality.”

“No, I think not. I have not been round, though; Mrs. Gamp slept late this morning.”

Lady Yorke bowed, and Sir Richard cordially shook Constance’s hand, and the carriage drove off.

Constance sat holding her newly-recovered treasure, and observed to her companion,

“Surely this is a good omen!”

It was sad to witness how both ladies tried to act as if there was not an overwhelming misfortune ready to crush them. It was the custom of Lady Yorke to read at tea-time, whilst Constance officiated in pouring out the sweet-scented orange Pekoe in which her hostess delighted. Lady Yorke was a water-drinker, and was "particular" as to the flavour and quality of her teas.

I heard of a gentleman once, who was so refined an imbibor of the pure element, that he could tell the flavour of every different pump in London.

"This," he would say, "is Aldgate. This jugful has been brought from Covent Garden; this" (with a frightful grimace) "must come from Westminster."

So folks have their "particular vanities," as Sam Weller says, all the world over, and particularity is not confined to wine-bibbers and "publicans and sinners." But she most

enjoyed her orange Pekoe when she had a book in her hand, and could eat and read alternately. Constance had usually provided her book and prepared her buttered toast. On this occasion she had brought a volume of Prescott's "Philip the Second of Spain," unconscious that the perusal of the volume would convey bitter remembrances to the heart of the poor mother. There was the page which he had last read—a half-sheet of note paper within the leaves, with slight plans drawn of the ground and the fields of battle on which the inhabitants had defended their liberties and faith against Duke Alva and his son Ferdinand. She had marked the flash of enthusiasm that lighted up his face as he read on, she knowing the pages by heart, and guessing whereabouts in the narrative his eyes had reached, and rejoicing in the stern sympathy that glowed within his breast.

She put down the book silently. She was a woman not given to outward demonstrations of grief—sighs and tears were unknown to her personal experience, but she was not the less intensely wretched.

When the tea was dismissed, Constance longed to propose chess, but she feared to remind Lady Yorke still more vividly of Eustace. Each took up some needle-work, and felt relieved when the hour of ten dismissed them from their weary tasks. There was another day to be passed. At six on the following morning the antagonists would meet. How long would they have to wait for the telegram? Neither knew, and no question was hazarded by Constance, nor suggestion made by Lady Yorke. Each retired to her anxious solitude, and both felt that the worst would occur to-morrow. He was still safe. Sometimes an insane feeling possessed Lady Yorke that she must

prevent the meeting. She would telegraph to the civil magistrate at Boulogne, and call on him to arrest the combatants before mischief ensued. A few moments of reflection brought before her Eustace's stern face of displeasure at her interference, and she subsided into patient wretchedness. She was not the only one who had thus suffered, she considered, for her memory recalled one fair young creature, scarcely twenty-one, the wife of an officer, who, at her husband's command, sat, watch in hand, through the weary night, whilst he slept his last sleep, till the hour arrived when she called him to go forth to mortal strife with a near relative, and then waited hour after hour alone till the message came that he wished her to go to receive his last farewell. Lady Yorke groaned in bitter sympathy for the bygone grief, and felt that her case was not isolated.

On the following morning Lady Yorke

rose at five o'clock, and wandered out into the garden. Her Eustace, she knew, would be stirring as early—but for what a purpose! This conviction spoilt to her all the melodies of the morning, the soft twittering of birds, the cawing of rooks, “the cock’s shrill clarion,” and the “sheep-fold’s simple bell.” The white mist curled up through the valley, and the sun made all nature brilliant by irradiating the dew-drops on the shrubs and flowers. Presently she saw the gamekeeper coming towards her with some pheasants and a hare in his hand, and then she remembered it was the first of September. She wanted to get away from him, but she could not do so without vexing him, and for this she was too well bred.

“Got a few birds for the house, my lady,” in a cheery tone. “I was disappointed when I heard Sir Eustace was not a-keeping his promise about the shooting. I said, sure

Read Partridge

as he's alive he'd be here this day as ever is—first o' September. I count he can't touch a feather, unless 'tis peacocks, and parrots, and emus, such as they kill in the Injies. I thought 'twould be a comfort to kill a Christian bird like. I mean to kill a few birds in a Christian country. Mayhap he's got better shooting elsewhere. Does my lady think he'll be back soon?"

Lady Yorke hoped so, and turned the conversation on the merits of a young retriever, hoping to avoid more reference to Eustace, but in vain. The gamekeeper told her how "the black fellow" had been sent 140 miles to look after a dog called "Jim," who had strayed away, and how grieved the Sahib had been when Kali Khan returned without the animal. Sir Eustace was always so good to dumb creatures!

Lady Yorke told him to go in and get some beer, and tell the cook to dress a

brace of pheasants for luncheon. She was glad of the division of time made by the meals, yet felt choked when she tried to eat. She was conscious of an unjust repugnance towards Constance, who was the cause of all this grief and anxiety; yet when she saw the poor girl's miserable expression of countenance, this feeling changed to pity.

After breakfast, Watson came to consult her mistress on a difference of opinion she had had with the housekeeper, touching some dinner-napkins which Lady Yorke had ordered.

“Yes, yes! quite right. I *did* order them—take them away.”

“But, my lady, you see that if the thread of the damask runs straight, it stands to reason it can't be so glossy as when it runs across—to say nothing of its being stronger. Now, Mrs. Corrance says she thinks your ladyship likes them best zigzag; says I, ‘I’ve

knowed my lady this eight-and-twenty year, and if I don't know what my lady likes, I don't know who should know—unless 'tis herself.'"

"Very well. Just as you please, Watson."

"A likely thing! What answer is that to give, I should like to know. What would Mrs. Corrance say to *that*? Just as *I* pleased. I want to give your ladyship's opinion."

"Oh! the cross, by all means," said the lady.

"Umph! 'Tis always against me; but, my lady, about those things Sir Eustace sleeps in. *Pie jamas*, or something of the sort. I thought of pies and jams, to keep the name in my head. I wonder a Christian can like to sleep in such heathenish garment—says the black fellow, his master always bathes in them too. I don't believe no

such thing, says I—Sir Eustace have a beautiful white skin, that he needn't be ashamed of; not like them black niggers, glad to hide their colour in white calico. But about the *pie jamas*, my lady, will you write down to send for two yards three quarters and five eighths to London, that I may finish the work."

"Yes, that will do."

Coming back—

"Please, my lady, three reels of cotton, like the last from Swan and Edgars."

"Oh! pray go, Watson, you drive me crazy—my head is so bad!" said the poor lady, leaving the room.

"What's up there?" said Watson to herself, suspiciously. "Something about that young fella', I dare swear. Fool my lady was to keep constant to a dead husband, when she might have had a fine living one by this time, if she'd married again; and 'tis

my belief her love is more plague than profit to her big boy."

The day wore on in silence, and the irritation of constant watching on the part of the two females. Eustace's fate had been decided for some hours; but no telegram had come. Lady Yorke's face had become a grey stone colour. She walked up and down incessantly in the dining-room, which commanded the access to the front of the house. Then she thought the telegram might be carried to the back of it, and, throwing a shawl over her head, she walked, with steps quick and short from agitation, to where her eye could overlook all the approaches to Elm Hall. At length she perceived a carriage approach, and her heart stood still for an instant, and beat again with frightful speed.

Eustace was dead, and some one was coming to "break the news" to her, as it is

called. With the composure of desperation she awaited its approach ; but saw when it drew near that it contained the fat, placid person of Mrs. Mag. The trunk of a tree had concealed her, and she took advantage of it, not feeling equal, in the present strain on her nerves, to endure the presence of a stranger.

Constance was within, and the servant ushered Mrs. Mag into the drawing-room, where she pounced upon the unhappy young lady.

“ Well, my dear, how do?—lost your roses, eh?—fatigue, I daresay—pleasant party, though, wasn’t it?—and my lady?—not up yet?—ah ! gone out—be in presently, perhaps—well, my dear, now tell me quite confidential,” drawing her chair close to that of Constance, putting on the young lady’s slender hand her fat fingers squeezed into gloves that were so tight that they came

only half-way to the wrist, making a cutting line over the back of the hand, “now tell me,” and Constance feared the question involved the subject which so agitated her, and turned paler than before—“tell me what people thought of my rig out?”

Constance, relieved, assured her that it had excited the most attention, and had been certainly one of the richest in the gardens. Mrs. Mag was satisfied, and expanded into greater breadth and bloom.

“I thought so,” said she. “I left my card, as in dooty bound, on my lady just before I come here. She was inwisible; but Sir Richard came, and was quite the gentleman, and gave me some cherry-brandy—no, brandy cherries—there *is* a difference, you know. Well, I thought my lady might have seed me—but she didn’t, so I comed away. Sir Richard put me into the post-shay quite perlutely—helped me up by

my hellbow, for there's but one step, and 'tis over-steep. When we drove off, I fell a-thinking whether the man as drove had had a snack too, so I lets down the glass, and I says, 'Did they give ye anything to eat or drink?' 'Oh! yes, mum, very hospital.' Says I, 'Is there any truth about my lady being ill?' for I felt royled she didn't see me; and then he told me, and let his 'oss go at a walk, as how the servants believed there was something wrong between the gentlemen, and four of 'em was gone out to fight a duel. Poor Sir Richard, honest man, knowed nothing about it; but the servants said 'twas cause the gents were all mad about my lady; and Sir Eustace and Mr. Saint Cyr was the wust of them; and my lady's eyes were as red as ferrets. I never liked that Sir Eustace—not I—a prig of a fella—nobody good enough for him! And as to that Wictoria Cross of valour, as

they call it—I don't wallor it a mite, not I ; give me a good game of fisticuffs, such as my Theoffy can play at. There's more plucky things than ever gets Wictoria Crosses !”

“ I do not think—I cannot believe that it can be anything wrong about Lady Levinge,” said Constance, miserably, and ready to cry.

“ Don't tell *me*, my dear—you are too innocent to see through people as your elders can. But, come now, when will you come and stay with me ?—my lady has had you long enough, in all conscience. Nice spare bed, dimity curtains, washed and starched as nice as ninepence ; fried bacon, crisp and brown, for breakfast ; fresh eggs—can hear the hen chuck as she lays them—well, well,” seeing Constance hesitate, “ stay out your welcome here, if you can ; you shall come to me any time—they're not too agreeable at

your father's house. Good-bye, my dear—Mr. Mag will be waiting dinner if I aren't back ; and we've a picture of a turbot, if the cook don't spoil it. Good-bye."

But Constance went down to see if she wanted any help to get into the carriage ; the footman, however, gave the lady a lift by the *hellbow*, which deposited her safely inside ; from whence she nodded kindly to Constance, pleased that she had accompanied her to the door.

The interruption, though irksome, had not been without its use. Another portion of the weary day had been passed. Some one has said that the hours thus wished away would be invaluable to "the wretch condemned with life to part ;" but, to judge of that, you must endue him with the same restless anxiety which makes the minutes intolerable to yourself ; and as human nature is pretty much alike in every breast, I doubt

the correctness of the observation. It is possible, however, that the prospect of immediate death deadens every other interest, except a selfish one.

Constance joined Lady Yorke in the grounds when Mrs. Mag was gone, and they walked together till the grey mists of twilight darkened the landscape, and prevented any object from becoming visible in the distance. Then they went to their appetiteless dinner; and after it had been removed, they sat listening with an intentness that made them giddy.

“You may as well go to bed now, Constance—I will wake you if——”

“Will you not let me stay?”

“No—go to bed. I will come and listen in your room.”

Constance obeyed, though she would rather have remained up, and Lady Yorke began her rapid, never-ending walk up and

down the room. Constance felt dizzy in looking at her as the hours went on. She was so like some untamed beast Constance had seen at the Zoological Gardens, moving backwards and forwards in its den.

The dawn began to peep through the closed shutters. Lady Yorke threw them open, and extinguished the candles. She could look now as well as listen.

“You have some white powder fallen on your hair, Lady Yorke,” said Constance from her bed.

“Have I?” replied the elder lady, unconscious of what Constance said, or of her own answer; for there was a figure, dimly seen, on horseback in the distance.

“It is coming,” she said, and she relighted the candle, and descended the stairs, to open the door herself, and receive the telegram.

Constance, in a dressing-gown, was at her

side, and looking at her as she stood waiting for the man's approach. She perceived that Lady Yorke's hair had become white during the past miserable hours, when it had before been of a glossy black. She opened the telegram. It ran thus :—

“ I am hurt—not dangerously. S. C. is. I shall be glad if you will come.”

“ Oh ! thank Heaven !” said the poor mother, her voice breaking into a sob. “ I must go to him at once.”

Constance had sunk on her knees ; her thoughts were of thanksgiving. I am not sure that the idea of Saint Cyr's dangerous wound might not have added to her satisfaction ; but the selfish thought was checked so soon as detected—for would not Lady Yorke and Eustace be made miserable at his death by the hand of Eustace ? Whatever would have been the feelings of his mother, I am pretty sure that Eustace had

taken life too often to be particular on the score of one, more or less, especially as he did not consider that of Saint Cyr to be particularly valuable.

Lady Yorke had retired to her room, and was eagerly putting some clothes together.

“Look at the Bradshaw—see what trains will enable me to reach the Boulogne boat with least delay.”

Constance found the place, and then went to call up the servants, that they might prepare some breakfast for their lady.

“Poor girl!—poor Constance!” said Lady Yorke, tenderly—“what will you do? You must go home, I suppose.”

Constance bowed; her voice could not be commanded just then. She longed to wail out, “Let me go with you!” but she dared not.

“I shall not have time, my dear, but do you write to your father to come and fetch you, or send some confidential person to take his place. You had better say my son is ill, and I have had to go to him.”

Constance assented. She prodigalized cares and attentions to Lady Yorke; and when all was done, she saw her depart with a feeling of desolation which seemed overwhelming.

“I will write to you, Constance. Command everything in the house in my absence, for your own comfort or amusement,” and the carriage rolled on, and Constance was left weeping on the steps.

Constance had good cause for tears. The house seemed very desolate without Lady Yorke, whose kindness of manner to Constance not even the mystery attached to that young lady could alienate. I am not sure that in the same degree that Eustace

seemed to be repulsed by those unknown circumstances, Lady Yorke, no longer fearing a rival in her son's affections, did not feel more tenderness and commiseration. Constance had been very pleasant to her as a companion—intelligent, sweet-tempered, and with a quiet devotion of manner which arose from the love she bore Eustace, and which, as she dared not show it in her manner to him, she lavished on his mother.

Very sad she felt, wandering over the empty house, filled with remembrances of her friend, and of him who had been her lover. She put back into their places the books which she had read to Lady Yorke, and then wrote to Mr. Rivers to ask him to send for her on the following day. She dared not ask him to come for her, as Lady Yorke had suggested. Then Constance remained biting the top of her quill, and thought how she was isolated in the world,

and that, weak and foolish as she had been, she had been also hardly treated by fortune. But for that one fatal act, which had made her incapable of becoming the wife of any high-minded gentleman like Eustace, whom she loved so tenderly and devotedly, what had she ever done to be so deserted? She wept silently and helplessly, and then sat down, when she had packed her small wardrobe, and tried to finish a pair of slippers she had begun for Eustace. Then she wondered if he would wear them, and whether he would think of her if he did so, not knowing, poor girl, that the *gage d'amour* which you wear ever round your neck, or on your feet, excites little attention in your own mind after the first day that it is put on. Then came a more perplexing thought—should she have money enough to pay for their being made up? She should like to do that. And she turned her small

store out of her purse and tried to calculate what the railway fare would be, and what the cabs; but could come to no conclusion, never having travelled alone. If her father sent old James, perhaps *he* would pay for her. She should not mind asking him, and begging her father to repay him. She resolved to put her necklace into her pocket, lest her portmanteau should be lost; and then she thought it would be safest, after all, packed up with the lovely little Pamela costume. Then she took a walk in the garden, to wile away the tedious hours of time, and wondered why, on ascending the steps of the terrace, she was so breathless. She must have buckled her corset too tightly that morning, she thought, in the hurry of her dressing. In the evening she took a blank book, and made extracts from different works she had read with Lady Yorke. It would be like being in her company again

to read them when she arrived at her father's house. This occupied her till bedtime. Her thoughts were with her friend in her passage across the Channel, and she thought how she would fret at every unnecessary delay till she reached the bedside of Eustace. Constance called him Eustace in her thoughts. He had asked for her love, and had avowed his own. It was all of no use, but very sweet to think on. But he was angry now, and the image he had once made of her in his mind was doubtless blurred and dimmed. As to the scandal told by Mrs. Mag, it was to Constance's mind simply impossible to give it credence. Her idol she believed to be too pure in thought ever to feel any preference for a married woman, that he might not avow before all the world.

On the following day James arrived to fetch Constance, and deposited her safely

at No. 36. Her heart sank within her as the two girls peeped from the dining-room, and saying "'Tis only Constance," went back and shut the door. She went up to the drawing-room. Mrs. Rivers sat in her accustomed place, with the unfinished netting Constance remembered before she left home.

"So you're come!" was all the greeting given, as Constance walked forward to take her hand. But the hands never left their occupation for an instant, and Constance's dropped by her side.

CHAPTER VI.

" Let me not have this gloomy view
 About my room, about my bed ;
 But morning roses, fresh with dew,
 To cool my burning brow instead—
 As flowers that once in Eden grew,
 Let them their fragrant spirit shed ;
 And every day the sweets renew,
 Till I, a fading flower, am dead."

CRABBE.

CHILLED and offended, Constance ascended to her own room. It was comfortless enough at all times, but worse than usual now. The atmosphere was close, the bed without sheets, pillow-cases, or counterpane ; the mattress rolled up and the blankets folded ; no water nor towels on the stand. The windows were encrusted with the smuts which settle after every shower of

rain, and inside was a collection of dead and dying flies on the window-ledge, showing that the room had not been dusted since Constance had left it.

Her first desire, to breathe freely, made her throw up the window, which brought accumulated dust into her face, and made her cough. But bad as it was, it was less disagreeable than the unfriendly faces downstairs. So she remained, and attired herself in her dinner-dress, and waited till she knew her father had returned before she descended. Before she could accomplish this, she had to ring for the housemaid, who brought her water and towels, and apologized for the state of the room.

“No one had told her Miss Rivers was coming back,” she said.

Constance thought of the dainty chamber she had occupied so long at Elm Hall—the fresh landscape in the distance, the rich par-

terre of flowers on which the eye fell as it looked from the window; the room furnished with every luxury as well as every comfort, but most of all the atmosphere of good-breeding which pervaded the whole *ménage* of Elm Hall, and which is an excellent substitute for real kindness of heart where that does not exist; but when backed by true benevolence, the effect is as soothing as cotton applied to the scorched surface of your skin.

She ran down when she heard her father knock at the door, eager to embrace him, and see at least one person on whom she had a claim for affection. Her arms were round his neck, and she had kissed him before he was well aware of her presence. The sudden kiss deranged the position of his hat, and it was in danger of falling.

“ Oh! ’tis you, Constance! There—

there, that will do, my dear ! Let me get off my hat and coat quietly."

She followed him into the gloomy library.

"Well, so my lady is off to France, is she ? Son ill—I suppose you're sorry to come back ?"

"I am glad to see you again, papa, and I hope you will be a little glad to have me again," and her voice went off into a quavering cry.

"There, don't cry, there's a good girl ; I've enough to worry me, Heaven knows, in such times as these. Try to get on with them upstairs—you'll be more comfortable there ;" and her father hurried away, not liking Mrs. R., as he called her, to know of this private interview.

At dinner he placed her next to himself, and helped her before his other daughters. He looked up once, and seeing her pale sad face, which startled him by its resemblance

to her mother's as he had last beheld it, he asked "if she were ill—she had better take a glass of sherry;" and Constance, grateful for the attention, drank it, and felt worse, though the flush that came on her beautiful face from the quickened circulation made her look better. The added colour, giving added beauty, made Mrs. Rivers more savage than she had been before.

"There's nothing the matter with *her*, Mr. Rivers. I wonder she condescends to drink your sherry, when she must have been accustomed to first-price French wines. I'm afraid you turn up your nose at our humble fare, Miss Rivers, I s'pose my lady keeps a French man-cook?"

Constance did not reply.

"Well, I'm worth an answer, I s'pose!"

"I really do not know, ma'am, of what nation Lady Yorke's cook may be; we never spoke on the subject."

“Now, that’s what I call real humbug and affectation ! You didn’t talk about the servants?—pray what had you to talk about?”

No answer.

“I suppose my grand lady talked about *me* and my daughters, and cut us up finely !”

“I assure you,” said Constance, simply and eagerly, “I do not think she ever thought of you and your daughters, and I know she never spoke of them in my presence.”

This was the finishing of Constance’s iniquities.

“I call that right-down impudence in that girl !” she said, in a fury. “Mr. Rivers ! am I to be spoken to so, in my own house?”

“Indeed, I only spoke the truth,” said Constance, scared at the violence of the storm.

“Hush! hush! Constance,” said her father, “don’t answer your step-mother.”

Constance was not quick in seeing the wounds she inflicted on the self-love of others—she had so little of her own. Had she known more of the world, she would have perceived, before she answered, that to be ignored by the minds of those superior to oneself inflicts the bitterest of mortifications. The anger subsided outwardly to smoulder concealed. Constance had not yet even filled up the measure of her offences. Miss Jane began—

“I saw the account of a great party near Elm Hall, given by Lady Levinge. I suppose *you* were not asked.”

“Yes, I was asked,” replied Constance.

“And did you go?”

“Yes, I went.”

“Lor!” said Miss Jane.

They were all silent for a short space.

“Did they wear fancy dresses?” said the eldest sister; for Mrs. Rivers, though bursting with curiosity, felt too much injured to inquire.

“Yes,” said Constance, finding monosyllables safest.

“Goodness! and what dress did you go in?”

“I was in the costume of Richardson’s Pamela.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Rivers, “the widow of poor Lord Edward Fitzgerald.”

“Nonsense, papa; Pamela was the wife of Squire B——.”

“Well, my dear, then she married again, I suppose.”

“*Who* did you see?” said Jane, regardless of grammar.

“Many hundreds of people. None whom you could have known, except one—Mrs. Mag.”

“Mrs. Mag! how on earth did she get there?”

“I really do not know.”

“Who sent *her* a card of invitation, I wonder?—through *who* did she get it?”

“I really do not know,” said Constance, to whom now it became a wonder, which the previous grave circumstances connected with the *fête* had hitherto prevented her dwelling on.

“I am sure no one could have known her there,” said Mrs. Rivers, spitefully.

“Oh! yes, ma’am, Lady Yorke met her in your company, and liked her.”

Worse and worse—Mrs. Mag had been liked, and Mrs. Rivers never mentioned! No doubt she had been asked to the *fête* through Lady Yorke’s influence, and she and her daughters were left neglected at home. “I think, Miss Rivers, you might have got *us* cards,” said she.

“I never spoke to Lady Levinge in my life.”

Here they rose from table and went to the drawing-room, and there followed a burst of questions about the *fête*. How all the people were dressed—how they looked—what they did; but as Constance found that each person named by her was like a pigeon flung up in the air to be shot at by three eager and cruel archers, she soon ceased to answer; on which she was pronounced to be spiteful and dull.

Constance was restless and feverish during the night. In the morning she awoke feeling suffocated, and darted out of bed to drink from the water-bottle; but she was unable to swallow till she had let some blood flow from her mouth, which had gathered at the top of her lungs. It did not hurt her, and she thought nothing of it. This recurred for several mornings. At

length the housemaid, who was older and more experienced than herself, asked to speak to Mr. Rivers, and told him of Constance's state. She had said nothing to Miss Rivers, for fear of alarming her ; but did not her master think that the poor young lady should have a doctor ?

Mr. Rivers was troubled at the thought of the apothecary's bill. If a fellow once gets into your house, says he, you can't tell him not to come again without offending him. I'll take her to a physician, pay my guinea, and have done with it. Then I shall have done my duty. He ~~did~~ so, and the report made by Dr. Williams was unsatisfactory. This, of course, was not told to Constance, and her father had not any intention of informing his wife of the fact ; but accident unsealed his lips, and revealed the truth to Constance.

One morning, as Constance went down

to breakfast, she passed by her father's and step-mother's bed-room. They were "having words" about her, seemingly, and she heard her father say—

"You would not be so bitter against her if you knew how short her life will be."

"How do you know?—who told you?—she's well enough."

"Dr. Williams says she cannot live many months."

Constance passed on—very pale. She had heard her death-warrant, and death was very terrible to her young mind.

"Oh! I cannot die yet!" she cried out in her agony—"I *cannot* die till I see him again! But I may die before they come home. I will write to Lady Yorke—I will tell her all. When I am dead they may love me a little, and pity me much."

Next day Constance received her slippers made up, and paid for the making. As her

father had re-imbursed John for her journey she had a few shillings left, with which she procured a blank book and wrote the history of her young life, which we shall give the reader more succinctly.

CHAPTER VII.

“ My cradle was the couch of care,
And sorrow rocks me in it ;
Pale seems her saddest robes to wear
On the first day that saw me there,
And darkly shadowed with despair
My earliest minute.”

LORD STRANGFORD.

(Translation from Camoens.)

WHEN Constance had first been taken to the gamekeeper's house by Patty, she had been considered by him as representing fifty pounds a year, and regarded with indulgence accordingly. He had married and lost his wife early in life, and the clergyman took pity on the little motherless girl, and educated her with his own grandchild, Constance's mother.

When Patty had first returned with her

charge, a delicate, wailing infant of a few days old, the gamekeeper, who had been for years accustomed to live without any companion in his house, required all the thought of the £12 10s. quarterly to induce him to put up with the nuisance. Patty was uncomfortable in his house; she loved her father tenderly, and saw that she was not contributing to his happiness; but she had that natural craving for children which sometimes dwells in the breasts of the childless. No one had ever courted Patty. Her plain, pale face had found no favour in any eyes, excepting those of the infant, who smiled and patted it when she saw the sweetness of her nurse's expression.

The place of housekeeper at Boscobel became vacated by one who was tired of living in that dreary old house, and Patty applied for and obtained the situation. When she had done so, her father, with the

injustice which often arises in the human breast, was inclined to reproach her for her wish to leave him, and in his secret thought for depriving him of a great portion of the coveted fifty pounds yearly. But the deed was done. Patty had the promise of the place, and he dared not offend his master by compelling her to decline that for which she had applied. So, man-like, he took it out in grumbling.

James Evans, gamekeeper, was a man of about forty-five years—stalwart in his bearing and appearance, and looking as unlike as possible the money-loving person he really was. He was an elder of his congregation, and in conviction a rigid Calvinist. This conviction influenced his conduct. Attentive to his religious duties—shrewd and proud of the position he held amongst his neighbours—he enjoyed the reputation of being a conscientious and God-fearing

man. He was also, it was thought, "well to do." He had a good salary, and a convenient dwelling, and no large family to maintain. He had accumulated some savings, which, having grown beyond the sums retained by the savings' bank, were invested in the three per cent Consols. Patty removed to the great house, where she resided with her charge. The fifty pounds a year paid for Constance enabled her to hire a girl to assist her in nursing the infant, and in cleaning the house.

Time went on very peacefully, and Patty began to save at once from the £50, wisely believing that the child would have more requirements as she grew older. What she accumulated, she gave to her father to invest for her. She was a simple-minded woman, and knew nothing of investing. Of course her father would do it for her; and he did invest it, and gave Patty the stock receipt.

Time went very slowly at Boscobel, and Constance grew up into beauty and refinement, notwithstanding the few opportunities afforded for acquiring the latter. But Patty had a sweet, gentle manner and a soft voice ; and as Constance's hours were spent with her, in reading to and working with her, no discordant elements ever mixed with their intercourse to ruffle them into coarseness and vulgarity.

“The housekeeper's room” was dear to Constance's childish fancy. How large it was !—how comfortable the fire !—how commodious the easy-chair in which Patty reclined !—what wonderful drawers there were full of spices and candied fruits !—what jars of preserves piled one above the other !—what recesses filled with wonderful liquors, and cherry-brandy and brandy cherries. These were accumulated for “the family,” when it should arrive ; but the family

thought the preserves could wait, and knew Boscobel to be at least two hundred miles too far from London.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ A man of a most fair propose,
Framed to make women false.”

SHAKSPEARE.

IN the meantime fruit went for nothing, and Patty used to preserve and candy fruit for the pleasure of her darling, with sugar bought by herself, for she was too conscientious to use that which she purchased for her master.

There was one member of “the family,” however, who thought he might as well shoot some of the game which was sent in proper season yearly to his brother’s house in town. Mr. Saint Cyr was tempted to exile himself from civilized life, not only

from designs to surpass the gamekeeper, but because some speculations in which he had been engaged had not turned out in the way he had expected. Boscobel was out of the world, and he had no fear that a bailiff would be found skulking behind some of the shrubs, ready to give that loathsome tap on the shoulder which those expect who have "crimes unwiped of justice," *i.e.*, unpaid bills due to men "who have always a large account to make up in a few days, and will be obliged by a remittance by return of post."

Now Patty, as a good housekeeper, was accustomed to economise the amount of coals allowed for warming and drying the house ; consequently Constance slept with her in a different bed every night, and each day they occupied during the season of fires a different sitting-room. This was agreeable to Constance's girlish love of variety ; and

the fresh objects suggested endless trains of thought ; and numberless legends, gathered by Patty at different times, from departed housekeepers, with respect to the scenes which had been acted in them, and the originals of the pale portraits, who were forgotten, excepting by the descendants of those who had lived in their immediate neighbourhood, and existed no longer, except in those fading images, and the half-effaced letters tossed carelessly into unnoticed cabinets.

Thus it happened that one day, when Patty was preserving October peaches in the houskeeper's room, Constance was lounging before the drawing-room fire in the evening, reading some old volume taken from the library, bound in dark leather, and abounding in capitals, the door opened, and a gentleman came towards her. Constance looked up startled, and rose. The gentle-

man was as much astonished at the apparition of a beautiful and refined-looking girl, as she had been at his appearance, and far more pleased. Constance spoke first.

“Are you my lord, or his brother?”

“Why?”

“Because—” and she hesitated, and looked at the portrait which hung over the fire-place.

“Yes, there is a strong family likeness. I fear we are ‘tenth transmitters of a foolish face!’” And he smiled with a conviction that his face might be called crafty in expression—sinister ever—but never “foolish.” “I am not ‘my lord,’ however, but his brother, as you sagely suggested; and now I will ring for the housekeeper, and ask what I can have for my dinner, and which room is aired. I really did not expect so charming a companion in my solitude, or, believe me, I should sooner have come to Boscobel.”

The idea of Mr. Saint Cyr ordering her

foster-mother to prepare a dinner and bed for the guest, had made Constance's cheek flush with shame and anger. It was the first time she had ever recognized Patty as a servant of Lord Boscobel. All her duties had been so light, so unself-like, that the truth had never flashed on Constance till now ; and "poor dear ma !" as Constance called her, had been far from well with a fluttering of the heart, which was worse on quick movement or any agitation.

"I will go and see about your dinner," said Constance, going towards the door.

"No, pray do not, somebody will come presently, before I pull the bell-rope quite down !"

Constance put her hand out and arrested his.

"Pray do not ring any more, as she is not well. She will be so startled."

And she left the room to break the

news of Mr. Saint Cyr's arrival to Patty.

"Bless me! my dear! what can we do? Rump-steaks? Always tough in the country. We'll send Sally to see if there's a little joint of lamb at the butcher's. You'll pick the mint, my dear, and send to the gardener and ask him for a lettuce. I wish he had not come unannounced, it makes my heart beat so. Let me see—French beans and potatoes. Yes, that will do. Ah! Constance, so he saw you, my child?"

"Yes, ma. He is very like the picture of Sir Arthur Saint Cyr over the chimney-piece."

"My dear! keep in this room whilst he stays. He will hardly come into the kitchen. He is not a fit acquaintance for any young person, either of your sex or his own, for none can learn any good from him."

"Very well, ma, as you please; but he seems agreeable in his manner."

“No doubt. There never was a Saint Cyr who was not.”

Patty kept Constance so closely concealed that Saint Cyr grew more eager and irritated by his determination to see her, in spite of all the obstacles interposed by Patty. But as Constance loved her foster-mother more than any creature in the world, she carried out Patty's wishes; and though she saw the fair-haired, handsome man lingering about in passages through which he hoped she would pass at night, when she retired to rest, and waylaying her at dawn in her walks in the grounds, she always managed to avoid him.

So Saint Cyr consoled himself by long days of shooting with Patty's father, the gamekeeper. Saint Cyr was surpassingly shrewd, and he soon found out Evans Penrose's weak point to be a love of money. He

knew, too, from the park-keeper, a debauched-looking young man, much given to habits of intemperance, that “the old hunks,” as he called the gamekeeper, had been left sole trustee by a rich member of the congregation of Saint Agnes, for three thousand pounds, of which the interest was given to the poor attendants at the chapel. As he had savings of his own, the united sums would be worth Saint Cyr’s attention; and, should he succeed, he should have an agreeable command of ready money, and revenge himself on that spiteful old cat, the gamekeeper’s daughter. He always talked freely to his companions, or seemed to do so, for they generally found on reflection his agreeableness had arisen from his having made *them* talk. Evans Penrose would say little or nothing of his daughter’s charge, Miss Rivers; but as Saint Cyr went after out-

lying deer with Maurice, the park-keeper, he heard from him all that could be known about Constance.

“One thing is certain,” said Maurice, winding up his story, “them as belongs to her don’t care nothing about her, or she wouldn’t be here ;” with which sentiment Saint Cyr cordially coincided.

As Maurice’s heart expanded still more over the contents of Saint Cyr’s flask, he owned, with his head on one side, and many loutish gestures, that he was sweet on Miss Constance himself, though he’d never said a word to her, except a-touching his hat ; but, lor ! that didn’t count—he would speak fast enough when it came to the pint.”

Saint Cyr felt a natural shudder creep through him at the thought that this unredeemed brute might possess such a pearl as Constance ; but as Mrs. Maurice she could be more within his reach than under

the present guardianship; and if she could be brought to consent, why should she not be the wife of the park-keeper? So he told Maurice that he applauded his spirit, and would speak a good word for him when he had an opportunity.

In walking with Penrose, Saint Cyr spoke of the splendid fortune he, a poor devil of a younger brother, might make if he had a little capital—just a few thousands to embark—such a chance—a few shares, which a friend had offered him in the Grand Shaloo Alliance Company, would give twenty per cent. interest at the very least. Shares might be had reasonably enough now, but they were being bought up so quickly, that he doubted even now if he could procure any, only that he had a friend at court.

“And pray, sir, may I ask what is Shaloo?”

“Shaloo, or *sorghum saccharatum*, is a plant which grows in China and India now exclusively; but it is found that it will flourish as abundantly—in fact, more so—in the south of France, Spain, and Portugal. The idea is to purchase a tract of land at the lower part of Spain, and grow this plant, which will produce sugar enough to supply the whole of Europe, at about one penny farthing per pound, leaving an immense profit to be made by the shareholders. It cannot be a losing concern, for supposing (which is next to impossible) that the crops should be unproductive, there is the land to fall back on.”

“Pray, sir, have you ever seen any of this wonderful grass?”

“Got a seed or two of it in my pocket, my good man; you may tell the gardener to raise it in the green-house, when you may judge for yourself,” and he produced a few,

and placed them in the hard hand of his companion.

Penrose said no more, but walked on, so full of thought, that a covey rose, and Saint Cyr's gun had brought down one bird for each barrel, before the gamekeeper had recovered from his reverie.

Saint Cyr was far too crafty to recur to the subject. He knew that the poison was working, by Penrose's pre-occupied manner.

"How much is required?" Penrose said at length.

"Oh! a mere trifle, considering the advantages to be derived. £150,000 has already been paid down by the shareholders; there are a few hundred shares now *I* might procure, as a favour. You see, I have a friend in the secretary. To tell you the truth, Penrose, I have raised a couple of thousands on the rent charge I have on my

brother's estate, for this venture, so you may be sure I think well of it."

Nothing further was said; but Saint Cyr felt nearly as sure of Penrose's money as if it were in his own pocket. He whistled as he went, in the exuberance of his satisfaction, casting sidelong glances at the thoughtful face that moved beside him, and was in higher spirits, and shot far better, than usual. He announced that he should probably return to Town on the day following the next day, carefully refraining from saying it to Penrose, and letting it drop out in an order to his groom about shoeing his horse.

Penrose went to bed, but could not sleep for hours. His head whirled at the thought of future wealth. Yet to part with what he had—trust-money, too, for the poor of the congregation—was a bold measure. But then, if by the use of their money he could procure unexampled prosperity for himself,

surely *they* would be the better for it? If not in his lifetime, he would leave a bequest greater than that for which he was trustee; for Patty, poor girl, was not likely to live long, the doctor had said, and he need not think of her, as she would most likely die before him.

Thus Penrose argued, like many other folks, that he should be doing an act of charity in giving that which he could no longer enjoy, not knowing or not considering that all charity implies self-sacrifice—as Anne of Austria felt, when, with empty coffers, she gave her jewels for the foundation of the Foundling Hospital, at the intercession of Paul Vincent.

But the idea of his posthumous charity pleased Penrose in a degree only second to his notion of self-aggrandizement. He thought how much more he should be considered amongst the elders—“a warm man”

—a very warm man he knew he was considered *now*. How they would bow down to him when they knew of his unexpected prosperity !

He had quite made up his mind to sell out the trust-money and his own investment—Patty's thousand he would leave. She did not want her money to be increased, and he feared Saint Cyr would not be able to spare him shares enough for all. Everything about Saint Cyr betokened wealth, and his adjuncts were costly. Penrose had gone up to his room on one occasion to fetch his gun, and had seen the magnificent dressing-case, in which the gold fittings reposed on the richest of velvet—the open jewel-case, from which the diamond studs sparkled—the sovereigns and silver thrown carelessly from his pocket the night before, and not replaced in his shooting-jacket—on his dressing-table the family crest was re-

peated on his set of ivory brushes, and on the bed was flung a dressing-gown, richly embroidered, of soft Indian cashmere, lined and wadded with silk of the same colour.

Penrose knew not that Saint Cyr sailed through the world like the beautiful nautilus, with all his wealth in the shell which surrounded him.

Saint Cyr *did* go to Town, and bore orders from Penrose to his broker to sell out the trust-money and his own investment, from the much-maligned three per cents., and to deliver it to Gerald Saint Cyr, Esq., of Boscobel, in the county of Cornwall.

After a few days, Penrose received some mysterious papers from Saint Cyr, which, he understood, represented his claims on "the Grand Shaloo Alliance Company." Time went on, and six months after, when Penrose had been accustomed to look for the dividends from the despised three per

cent. Consols, in which he had heard Mr. Saint Cyr declare that none but fatuous old women ever invested their money, and was watching the post eagerly for some instalment of the wonderful Aladdin-like wealth which he anticipated as the result of his venture, he received a formal notice from the Shaloo Company to pay up ten pounds on each share, and no promise of any dividend to be received !

Penrose could not understand this paper, and gazed on it with staring eyes, and a face from which every colour of life had faded. He knew nothing of scrip, or paying up so much on each share. It was a contingency for which Saint Cyr had not prepared him. He wrote to that gentleman ; but his letter was unanswered.

Saint Cyr was disporting himself on the continent with Penrose's money. He thought of consulting the lawyer in the

neighbouring town; but he dared not confess from what sources he had procured the sums he had invested. He did that which many do when placed in a difficult position. *Nothing.* After a short delay he had another communication from the Grand Shaloo Company, that proceedings would be taken against him if he did not immediately pay up the sums demanded on his shares of the said company.

Terror-stricken, he sent orders to the broker to sell out poor Patty's thousand pounds, and paid the greater part into the unfathomed gulf of the Shaloo Company, keeping the remainder to meet the dividends due to Patty, and that which would be required for the poor of the congregation. That done, he had time to think of the ruin which it seemed was coming upon him. He *must* see Mr. Saint Cyr, to know how matters stood, and expended the little money he had

left in a useless journey to London to look for him. There he heard that Mr. Saint Cyr was on the Continent—letters were forwarded to him sometimes.

“ Might he look at the letters now lying not forwarded ? ”

The footman good-naturedly brought a packet, in which Penrose recognised his own hand-writing.

“ Most of them bills, my good fella’,” said the footman, patronisingly.

“ I daresay Mr. Saint Cyr ain’t over-anxious to pay postage for *them*. ”

Penrose put down sixpence, and begged the footman to forward his, when they had any address to go by. Might he see my lord ? The footman went, and, returning, said my lord *would* see Penrose ; who was forthwith ushered into the library, where his master sat in his dressing-gown at a table covered with papers.

“Well! Penrose, any complaints to make about poachers?”

“No.”

“Supply of birds good? That’s right.” My lord looked down on the letter he was writing, and seemingly forgot Penrose was standing disconsolately looking at his lordship. “What brought you up to Town, my good fellow? Come to see the lions?”

“No, my lord, I never had no fancy for wild beasts—if I had, there was a show of them at Launston, a week or two back; but I wanted to speak to Mr. Saint Cyr, about a little money he invested for me in the Grand Shaloo Company.”

“The what?”

“The Grand Shaloo Alliance Company, it is called, my lord.”

“I never heard of it, Penrose. If you take my advice, you will keep clear of any dealings with Mr. Saint Cyr. *I* don’t consider

myself answerable for anything he may do about money, or anything else. Good morning, my poor fellow. Go to the housekeeper's room and get something to eat, and keep clear of speculations and speculating young gentlemen."

My lord rang the bell, and Penrose knew he must go. He pulled his forelock, and retreated, with little appetite for the good cheer pressed on him by the housekeeper. As he walked listlessly through the streets to the terminus, he saw game hanging in the poulterers' shops, and compared it with that which he shot at Boscobel.

"Not so clean killed as my birds; not one of them shot in the head—breast right blown off from that one—leg smashed there. Mine would keep as long again." The dread of approaching poverty, and, with poverty, detection, came to his mind. He walked in and asked to speak to the master of the shop.

“My master down in the West,” said he, “wants to sell his surplus game. What will you give for pheasants, partridges, and hares, and sometimes woodcocks and snipes?”

The terms were agreed on, and Penrose knew that the compact was a dishonest one, but he argued—

“If Mr. Saint Cyr cheats me, why should I not take it out of his brother?”

As soon as he returned, he shot all day, and sent off the game at night; but a small portion reached my lord’s mansion in Eaton Square. His manner, which had all his previous life been bluff and hearty, now was depressed and morose.

“What *can* be the matter with father?” poor Patty would ask querulously of Constance, who could not answer her. Then Patty would go on to say that she was sure there was a curse on Mr. Saint Cyr, and

that father had never been the same man since his visit to Boscobel. "I'm sure," Patty would exclaim, "'tis something about money. Did you see how black he turned upon me when I gave him Trehern's bill for making his velveteen jacket? Time was he always was eager for his bills, to pay them, and get it done with."

Constance could only sympathize, and watch for any signs of improvement in "father's" temper. She was accustomed thus to call him, from unconscious imitation of Patty. Besides, he had been the only father whose love she had ever known, and Penrose, in her childhood, in the winter evenings, had been accustomed to take her on his knee and point out all the wonderful pictures of birds in Bewick, and tell her never-ending anecdotes of their nature and habits, with which his woodland life had made him familiar. Sometimes he brought

her a clutch of partridge's eggs, to rear under a hen, when the mother, from accident, had been decapitated by the reapers, sometimes a small hare or rabbit, that had missed maternal care; and Constance had been used to expect small enjoyments, to be derived from his presence when he came up to the house. She loved to please Patty, too, by showing deference and attention to Patty's father, and oftentimes expended small portions of her pocket-money in purchasing grave-coloured, rich-textured scarfs, for his Sunday wear at the Baptist Chapel. Thus Constance's disturbance at the change in Penrose was only second to that of his daughter.

But there was no improvement, for Penrose had by this time come to the conclusion that he was a ruined man. Patty asked him to draw the half-year's dividend of her money, and he said, gloomily, that he

could not attend to it yet. It was lucky that Patty's salary was regularly paid, and the fifty pounds for Constance's board and clothing. Every effort was made by Penrose to keep up his position in the little world around him, amongst the rival elders of his congregation. That grinning ass, too, the park-keeper—how Penrose hated him ! He always seemed to sneer at Penrose's age and piety—a drunken scoffer ; so proud, too, of being “ a good fellow,” and treating a friend to a glass of ale in a friendly open-hearted way. He never had been free-hearted in that way—it would have been unbecoming an elder of the congregation to have been seen drinking at a public-house. Why did he give way to the suggestions of the devil in the form of that accursed Saint Cyr ? He asked himself over and over again, forgetting that the tempting devil had been lurking for years in his heart, and only

waited for an opportunity to prove his supremacy, and his votary's ruin—the fiend Mammon.

CHAPTER IX.

“He takes no joy in office—honours, gain ;
They make him humble—nay, they give him pain ;
Of one sad train of gloomy thoughts possessed,
He takes no joy in food, nor friends, nor rest—
Dark are the evil days, and void of peace the best.”

PATTY'S anxiety about her father aggravated the disease which had been growing on her for years. She was unhappy if her father stayed away the whole day, and unhappy if, whilst present, he seemed morose and preoccupied. Sometimes, as the days drew on, and he did not appear—days sad from the languor of illness, which admitted not the diversity of occupation in which Patty's life had been hitherto passed—she used to send Constance

down to his cottage to "see after father," she would say.

Constance mostly found him sitting by the dreary embers of his wood fire, looking listlessly at the half-empty grate, with a depression in his aged face which it made Constance wretched to look upon. Then she used to poke up his fire, and make his tea, and occupied herself in little loving offices, which endue a young girl with the attributes of an angel.

"Father, Ma wonders you have not been up to see her to-day."

"Does she, my dear?"

"Can't you come, father?"

"I'm weary, child—my old legs have no strength in them."

"Then I'll stay till you are in bed, and make you a nice glass of hot brandy and water."

"No, no—I can't afford that."

“Look, father, I’ve bought this bottle out of my own pocket-money, which I had saved up, so don’t be stingy over what is not your own. Now go to bed, and I’ll wait here till you call me to bring the brandy. Where’s the kettle?—oh! here; now go.”

She kissed the old man’s cheek, and put the bit of candle she had lighted into his hand, and then busied herself in making the water boil. Penrose went to bed, and called the young nurse, who waited till she had taken the glass from his hand, and kissed his bald smooth head, and wished him “good night.” Then she hurried back to Patty, and told her that father had drunk his brandy and water, and had gone to sleep, sending his love; and that his legs had ached, or he would have come up to see her.

Penrose had managed to fight his way along by aid of the money he received for

the game; but that supply ceased on the first of February, and then ruin seemed to stare him in the face.

Patty had been found one day, after Penrose had been with her, by Constance in a passion of sobs and tears, white as a sheet, cold as a corpse, and shaking all over. It was in vain for some time that the girl interrogated the suffering woman, to whom agitation brought on an accession of violent pains in the heart. When, at length, she subsided into sleep, Constance took from her unclasped hand a small stamped piece of paper, which proved to be a receipt from a poulterer in London for fourteen brace of pheasants, ten ditto of partridges, and seven brace of hares. She sat silently for some time, puzzling as to why her "ma" had been so agitated at what had probably fallen from her father's pocket. What could it matter? Then, by

degrees, dawned on her the truth, that Penrose was in distress for money, and had sold the game which belonged to his lord. This probable solution of the mystery made the girl as pale as her foster-mother had been, and scarcely less agitated. She folded the paper again, and placed it in her mother's bed, so that, if she recollected it on awaking, she might think that it had not been seen, whilst her heart melted with tenderness and pity both for the old man, whose character stood so high in the neighbourhood, and who must be so self-conscious of his baseness, and for his innocent daughter, who was so wretched at its discovery, and so anxious to hide her father's iniquity from all eyes—even from those of the child on whom she doted.

The next day Patty was more ill and languid than usual. Constance took care not to observe her, as she got feebly out of

her bed, and dropped a piece of paper into the centre of the glowing fire. It was now the month of July, but the weather was chilly, and the atmosphere damp with incessant rains.

Money must be had, Penrose felt. He got up in the night, when all was still, and looked from his bedroom on the wide extended park, looking broader and grander in the moonlight, which threw giant shadows on the dewy grass. Quiet herds of deer were feeding in the recesses of the glades—half in light, half in shadow. He had often observed their habits before, and had watched them taking their rounds through the park. In the morning they were generally in one locality, and they moved by degrees, so that they might be traced from point to point with considerable certainty. In the park where they now were feeding the grass

was fine, and the sweet, small, but luxuriant clover was finest.

Penrose pondered—Maurice was probably sleeping off a drunken debauch at the ale-house. He made up his mind, and on the following night he acted on it. The park paling was old, and broken down in several places, so that a lusty buck could spring over it with ease. Thus, outlying deer were common in the neighbourhood of Boscobel, and one or more missed from the herd would only be supposed to have strayed.

Patty, worn down by anxiety about her father, and shocked beyond measure at the discovery she had made of his turpitude, declined daily. Constance saw her fading and dwindling away before her eyes, and felt helpless to arrest the swift progress made by her foster-mother to “the land where all things are forgotten.” She was all the world to Constance, except, indeed, the poor old

guilty father, for whom Constance felt more love, as pity was added to it. She knew not under what temptation that man, so seemingly upright, had fallen ; but she could judge of its potency from her knowledge of the gamekeeper's previous character and habits. She had fresh anxieties, which she concealed from her mother.

One day she had gone to seek Penrose at Patty's suggestion, who could not rest tranquil whether her father was present or absent. Constance reached the house, and knocked, but found the door fastened—as well as the lower windows, which she tried, intending, as a storm had just begun, to rest herself till it was over.

“I'll not be baffled by father's inhospitality,” she said, smiling to herself ; and catching hold of the branch of a chestnut-tree she swung herself to the upper window, and entered the room. “Now,” she con-

tinued, "he shall find a nice fire by the time he returns, and his tea set out."

She went down gaily and entered the kitchen; some large substance was lying covered on the table, and the covering of it was stained with blood. She felt sick, guessing what she should find before she lifted the cloth. She dropped it, and went slowly upstairs, letting herself from the window silently, and carefully obliterating the marks of her footsteps on the soft mould of the small garden in front of the cottage.

"Father was not in," she told Patty, in answer to her eager questioning. She could give her no hope of his coming up that evening, when he would probably be occupied in packing and sending to the train his stolen property.

That night some one knocked loudly at

the back door, and alarmed Patty, who had, in consequence, a paroxysm of pain in the region of the heart, so violent and prolonged, that Constance, seeing the staring eyes, the gasping mouth, and the whole body writhing in agony, whilst the sweat poured down the corrugated brow, wished, in the extremity of her pity, that her mother had ceased to live, as living entailed such terrible suffering.

In the morning the doctor came and gave some opiate, which was to be taken on any recurrence of the pain.

“I fear you are not careful enough in keeping her quiet,” he said to Constance, as they left the room together. “Remember that anything that worries, anything that agitates, any sudden noise that startles, may bring on the pain, and the consequences may be fatal. You will not wish to kill your

mother," continued he, who thought, because Constance was young, she must be careless.

"I would give my life for hers!" replied the girl.

"Well, my dear, such sacrifices do not come within our power every day, but every day, and every hour of the day, we may do something to contribute to the comfort of those with whom we live; and if they are ill or suffering, our care and tenderness should be greater."

Constance looked at him with her large, anxious eyes, and her lips formed the words "How long?" though no sound issued from them.

"If you are very careful she may live some weeks—perhaps months. I do not think, however, that she can last for three months longer, under the most favourable circumstances; and any sudden agitation

might bring back the paroxysm she suffered from last night, and then nothing can save her."

Constance said she would see about a nurse, but she feared her mother would object. At any event, Sally should come upstairs and sleep next to her in future.

That night Sally, being elated at her increased consequence and change of dormitory, was inclined to talk to Constance after she came up to her bed-room, and told Constance she wanted to speak to her.

Constance, fearful of disturbing her mother, came out softly, and shutting the door, prepared to listen, with no other idea than that of keeping her small attendant in good humour.

"Lor ! miss, who do you think I saw to-day ? Why, Master Maurice, and he asked how missis was, and how the young lady was—that's you, miss—and says he, she's

the most beautiful young lady he ever seed, and he would give all the world if you'd look towards him sometimes when you goes to church."

"Is that all, Sally?" said Constance, concealing a yawn with an attempt to execute a civil smile. "Because I'm sleepy."

"No, miss, that's not all. I seed somebody else, I did, and that's somebody you know well. I was a-kep waiting for missis's physic at the doctor's, and so the coach comed in just as I passed the 'Duke of Cornwall' public-house. I seed a gentleman git off the box. He had a cap pulled over his heyes that was tied under his chin, and hid up his beautiful whiskers, and a great cloak, with a stick-up collar; but I knowed him at once, 'cause, you see, he gave me half-a-crown when he was here, and said 'twas for my pretty heyes. Then I seed Master Maurice, just after passing him, and I turned

and seed them say something together, and go into the public-house."

"What did they say?" said Constance, turning pale, for the secret appearance of Saint Cyr in the country seemed in some mysterious way to augur ill to her father.

"Oh! Master Maurice said something like this, 'I'm glad you're come, sir—we'll catch the fox to-night.'"

"So I suppose," said Sally, "Mr. Saint Cyr ain't a hunting gentleman, else he wouldn't go destroying foxes."

Constance said,

"Probably not," and wished the little maid good night; but the words overheard filled her with dismal forebodings.

Had her father known of Saint Cyr's coming, he would certainly have mentioned the fact; and that Saint Cyr should prefer going to the public house, to sleeping in his own room at Boscobel, looked as if he were

determined to come secretly—"like a thief in the night," was Constance's thought, but she checked herself, feeling, alas! that her father merited that appellation certainly, whilst Mr. Saint Cyr had done nothing, which she was cognizant of, to deserve the simile. If her father should go out to kill a deer this night, he would be caught, probably, by the park-keeper and Saint Cyr. She felt sure they were about to watch for him.

She thought of the agony of the old man should he be detected—on the fatal effect on her foster-mother, to whose mind the loss of reputation would seem worse than death. She would go down to the cottage, and warn him not to go out! But then he would know that she was cognizant of his crime. This must be risked, however, if he were to be saved from the commission of a fresh one, and from its consequences.

She went in, and looked at her mother. Fearful of disturbing her, Constance did not feel her pulse, but counted the beats from the quick movements of the bed-clothes over her left shoulder. She moved carefully away from the bed, trying to avoid the slightest sound; but there was one plank in the floor which always creaked whenever any foot, however light, passed over it; and to-night Constance, getting confused by her anxiety to avoid it, touched it, and in the profound stillness that reigned the sound came with sudden startling clearness, and produced the effect she had deprecated. Patty started up with a look of terror.

“What is it?—has anything happened?—where’s father?”

“Nothing has happened,” said Constance, trembling. “I only touched that tiresome board in the floor that always creaks.”

“ Oh ! is that all ? ” sinking on the pillow with a sigh of relief. “ Come to bed, Constance—I shall sleep better if you are quiet, you know.”

Constance bent over to put the hair from her brow, intending to say good night, and steal away, but her mother seized her hand, and whispered—

“ Oh ! Constance, I have had such a horrid dream about—about my father ! I dreamed that the last day had come, and there was trouble and darkness, and in the midst a terrible light, too bright for any mortal eyes to face. I saw my father standing quite alone and downcast before the light, which I knew was the judgment-seat. I saw that he could not bear the light, because his deeds were evil, and a voice came from the depths of the darkness, ‘ Depart from me, ye wicked, into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnash-

ing of teeth.' Then the figure of my father seemed fading and darkening into shadow, and he gave a terrible wail of sorrow and shame; and then I awoke—so glad that you had broken the spell of that dreadful dream. Now, Constance, sit by my side for a little, and hold my hand, that I may not feel as if all real things were slipping away from me. If you stay there, my child, perhaps I may not dream again."

Constance came with a sinking heart. Every moment of time was precious. She wanted to be off to the gamekeeper's house, to warn him before he went into the park. Her mother seized her hand, and drew it closely towards her, and the girl sat down, keeping quite still, in the hope that the opiate would soon, by overwhelming her mother with heavy sleep, give Constance her liberty.

Ten o'clock sounded from the old church

clock in the distance. Constance could not see any moonlight yet through the ill-closed window curtains, and without light the gamekeeper, she knew, would be powerless. This made her more patient ; but she trembled lest her mother should awake, and be terrified at finding Constance had left her. She dared not leave her without anyone to be with her. If she had a paroxysm of heart-disease in her absence, she might be dead before Constance returned.

At length she seemed to sleep ; but when the girl moved, the hand tightened its grasp. How she wished that the night might close over, and prevent her father's expedition ! But of this there was no hope. She could see the stars twinkling in the deep blue sky. Soon there was a line of light at the horizon ; she must go now, if at all. She placed a bell at her mother's side, and awaking the girl, told her that she

was going to sleep in the room next to her mother, and if the bell rang she was to go to her mistress, and say that Miss Constance was sleeping, and begged not to be awakened, as she was tired. The child, proud of the importance of the trust, promised readily, and Constance left her; and after placing drink and physic at her mother's side, she lighted the watch-light, and descended the stairs softly. She had no time to get her bonnet, so she put the hood of a dark cloak over her head.

CHAPTER X.

“ Under thy mantle, night, there hidden lye.
Light-shunning theft, and traiterous intent,
Abhorred bloodshed, and vile felony,
Shameful deceit, and danger imminent,
Foul horror, and eke hellish drerement.”

SPENSER.

THE moon had cleared the horizon, and showed its glorious circle of light, as she sped over the park to the gamekeeper's hut. There was no light in it, excepting some dying embers within the grate, which she saw through the windows, which proved nothing. She had forgotten to bring lucifers with her, and was in the darkness when she stepped through the unbolted door. Her father often left it unfastened during

the whole night, so that he might be asleep in bed. Oh! how fervently she prayed that he might be! She called "father!" softly, and then louder, but there was no answer. She crept upstairs, feeling her way to his sleeping-room, with outstretched arms, and fearful lest she should come in contact with and knock down his gun. She felt for the bed, and passed her hands over it, but it had not been disturbed. On the chair by the bedside she found a lucifer-box, and lighted a candle. She might be mistaken, after all. Her father might be out on the watch for poachers. This view of the case raised her drooping spirits, and she walked about the house, trying to discover some traces of his occupation before he left it. She could gather nothing from anything she found, but on going to the wood-house she missed the wheelbarrow from the place where it always stood when unused. It was

seemingly but a trifle, but to Constance's mind it was conclusive. The barrow was to carry off the slain deer. From under the fagots in a corner she drew a small portion of the skin of a buck. Should her father's hut be searched, there would be convincing proof of his crime. Alas! she knew not how to conceal it. Probably there might be more in different parts of the house. If she could save him from detection, of which he was seemingly unconscious, she would induce him to destroy these terrible proofs of his guilt before they were found by others.

She extinguished the candle, and stood at the door listening, ignorant whither to direct her steps to seek him. By leaving the house she might be moving in a direction precisely opposite to that in which he had gone. In the distance she observed two dark figures moving stealthily across

the park, keeping under the shadows of the branching trees. They were searching for her father, doubtless. Oh! that she could fly and whisper in his ear to forbear but for one night.

“Oh! father! father! stop! do not fire! They will catch you! You can't escape them!”

Thus she cried out unconsciously in the silent night. Her father saw and heard nothing but the soft steps of the herd of deer, which came beneath the trees in the branches of which he had placed himself. He fires. The herd rush madly away, but one staggers and falls, and Penrose, throwing himself from the tree, rushes after him, and buries his woodman's knife in his throat. He is bending over his prey, and is about to rise, but a strong hand is on his shoulder, and turning his head suddenly, he sees the powerful form of the park-keeper, with

Saint Cyr standing by his side. His heart seemed for an instant to stand still. Had he anticipated detection, and dreaded it for days—had the horror loomed in the distance, and thrilled through his frame daily and hourly, he might have died in the despair of that moment ; but his strength had not been wasted by sleepless nights of terror. His conscience had become torpid by continued ill-doings. He was detected, and must bear the consequences ; and the feeling that had made him cower and shrink when he first felt the giant hand on his shoulder, passed away, and he stood up, with a dogged resolution to bear the results of his crime.

“ Yes, you’ve caught me killing my lord’s deer—’tis true—I shot the buck ; there is the barrow with which I meant to carry it away. You’ve ruined the old man !—you’re pleased now !”

“Scoundrel!” said Saint Cyr.

“Scoundrel yourself!” retorted Penrose.

“I was a happy man, a good man, respected by all my fellow-men before you tempted me! You ruined me!—you took from me all my money!—I will not be silent!”—(for Saint Cyr made a threatening gesture)—“I will tell to all the world how my lord’s brother took in a poor serving-man, and got from him all the few hundreds he had acquired in a hard and penurious life, for a bubble company, which I now believe never existed, that you might spend it with loose women in foreign countries, or with your cards and dice! You took my money!—you took that of the widow and orphan!—I defrauded them, and gave you their money! I have taken from my lord, your brother, the value of five pounds in the buck, that I may spend it in loaves for those you tempted me to defraud!”

Saint Cyr said only—

“Have you done?”

“No, I have not done. When I think of all I was, and what I shall be in a few hours!—denounced by you, a greater sinner than I am!—when I think that my daughter, who loves me, will break her heart, then I curse you, and I pray that God’s curse may light on you here and in the next world! Yes, you may take me to prison, and hang me, if you like, or send me over the seas; the old man can’t live anyway very long, and there will be no one to mourn for him!”

“Oh! father,” said Constance, rushing towards him, having stood apart and unnoticed before, on hearing this statement, as he uttered his last words, “I will love you always; so will she, if—” and here her voice went off into a shriek at the thought of her mother’s agony on hearing it—“oh!

sir," said she, with fingers twisting together in the extremity of her agitation, "oh! Mr. Saint Cyr, have mercy on him!—mercy!—mercy!" and she fell at his feet, and clasped her arms round his knees.

"Be quiet, maid!" said Penrose, roughly; "you don't know what you do, nor what kind of man you pray to—he has no pity!"

The clutch of Constance's arms round Saint Cyr made his pulse beat madly, as he looked at her dishevelled loveliness. He said nothing; and, still clinging, she upturned to him her beautiful face!

There was another person equally covetous of poor Constance's charms—the brutal park-keeper. He longed to see Constance at *his* feet, and grudged Saint Cyr his position.

Penrose was silent. He had borne the idea of detection with a terrible despair;

but he now began to tremble, as a gleam of hope flushed into his mind at Saint Cyr's hesitation. Constance, too, began to hope, and clung the closer to the man on whose breath seemed to depend her father's welfare.

"Rise, Miss Rivers," Saint Cyr said at last.

"No—no, not till you promise——"

"I promise to do all in my power to save your father."

"Oh! thank you a thousand times!" and she kissed the hand he extended to raise her from the ground.

"I cannot do much," he whispered—"there is the park-keeper."

"Oh! Maurice Warner, you will not betray my father?"

"Why, as to that, miss, I can't say; but if Penrose will go with us all together to his house, and give us a friendly glass, we might

hit on some way to make matters smooth."

"True," said Penrose, "for the wisest of men has said, 'Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not a secret to another. Let him that heareth it put thee to shame, and thy infamy turn not away.' If you will hide my iniquity this time, there is nothing I will not do to show my gratitude."

He took Constance's hand, fearful lest Saint Cyr should offer her his arm; but the latter hung back to talk with Maurice.

"Will he bolt, think you?" said he to the park-keeper.

"No, I think not; he is an old man, and his pony is old and stiff. I could run as fast as it could trot—besides, he ain't prepared; and if he did bolt, why (with a libidinous grin, like that of a satyr), he *must* leave the girl behind him."

“True,” said Saint Cyr drily ; “I forgot that consolation.”

Further conversation passed between the *roué* and the park-keeper, and plans were arranged, which were to be spoken of hereafter.

In the meantime, Constance walked by her father’s side, trembling still with her past terror and newly-found hope.

“Oh ! father—father, you will never do it again !—oh, say you will not !”

He answered impatiently,

“No—no, of course not.”

He was thinking of the spoils of dead bucks which might be found in the cottage. Constance thought of it too.

“Father, when we get home I will draw the cider and set the glasses, if you—if you—want to—to make things look tidy,” she said with an effort.

“Yes, you had better,” he said ; and he

hurried out so fast that Constance could hardly keep up, light-footed as she was. They reached the hut, and he went out into the darkness, leaving her to prepare the compelled hospitality. She had lit the candle, and drawn a jug of cider, and placed some pipes and tobacco on the table, when Saint Cyr and the park-keeper entered.

With a faltering tongue, she said her father would be in in a minute ; and pouring out the cider with shaking hands, she offered a glass to Saint Cyr, and one to the park-keeper.

On any other occasion Saint Cyr, from the instincts of good breeding, would have saved her the trouble ; but his present thought was to show that she was not to be considered as a lady, or anything in position above the gamekeeper's daughter.

She was growing more and more nervous at her father's continued absence—terrified

lest they should leave her and follow him, and find out what he was about; and she tried, with forced smiles, and little timid talk, to beguile the two men whom she so feared—to divert their attention.

They thought her infinitely lovely—more so from her timid helplessness. At length she became pale with a sudden terror. What if her father should have fled! She tried to fancy what would be the result if he should have done so. If he would but escape safely, what a blessing it would be!—but then how would her mother bear the news of his detection and disgrace?

Whilst these thoughts careered through her mind, her small effort at talking of golden pippins and pearmains, of the unaccountable death of trees bearing the former, and of the advantages of red streaks in cider brewing, sank into silence. She felt that they must detect her little designs to divert

their attention from her father, and feeling this, she looked piteously first at one man and then at the other—at the scornful sneer on the lips of Saint Cyr, and the stolid brutality of the park-keeper's face, more oily and brutal now from the effect of the drink, and felt more and more helpless. What pity could they feel?—what could they intend?

As they sat in silence her father returned, and Constance's heart ached to see the alteration which the last half-hour had made in his appearance—so white, so fallen in was his face. She could not refrain from rising and putting her hand on his shoulder caressingly. Saint Cyr spoke—

“Miss Rivers, you had better retire for a few moments, whilst we discuss with your foster-father the best means of concealing the transaction of this night.”

“Cannot I go home?” said Constance,

scared. "My mother my want me. I will go. I am not afraid——"

Saint Cyr took her arm and pointed to the stairs.

"On you will depend what course is to be adopted. You must go up to your father's room and wait."

Constance obeyed, and sat down on the foot of the bed, leaning her head on her hands. All was so frightful—she knew not what to expect, or how she could be expected to undo the tangled skein of wrong and grief. The time seemed endless before the light re-appeared at the bottom of the stairs, and she heard the voices of Saint Cyr and the park-keeper, and her father's accents in deprecation and entreaty. Then they were silent, and Saint Cyr ascended to the bed-room.

Constance rose at his approach, and tried to speak ; but her voice failed to produce

any distinct utterance. He approached her, and seated himself on a chair by the bed from which she had just risen. He took her arm, and with gentle force replaced her in her former position.

“ I will explain myself, as shortly as possible, for time presses. What I am about to say cannot but be most distasteful to you ; but you must consider that I have a difficult person to deal with in Maurice, and in the proposition I am about to make I have done my best for your father’s interest. The park-keeper loves you—has long wished to marry you.”

Constance made a gesture of impatience and disgust.

“ Yes, of course, I knew you would be furious—listen till I have concluded. Unless you promise to marry this man, he will, as soon as it is light, give information to the nearest magistrate, and get your father committed

to prison." Constance seemed turned to marble. Her white face and distended eyelids, and half-opened lips seemed those of a young Niobe. "Now, listen; if you will go with your father, and go through the ceremony of marriage with Maurice, according to the dissenting form, I will bind him, under a penalty of £500 to be paid by him to your father, to leave you unclaimed and undisturbed for six months after your marriage. This will give your father time to arrange matters for his escape, and, by appealing to your real father, the marriage may be easily set aside, contracted under age, and under such painful and unnatural pressure. I can do no more. I cannot control Maurice, except by his feelings about you."

"Oh! Mr. Saint Cyr—how can you—can you ask me to tell such a falsehood? How can I, without degradation, say that I will

marry that creature? I am a lady, sir, though I seem uncared for. How dare you propose such debasement to me !”

“My dear girl,” said Saint Cyr, “how can I gain anything by your marrying that lout? I only tell you that it is the only means of saving your father. The ceremony need not be binding. though he will so consider it. Your foster-father will escape. ’Tis for your sake alone, and because you so entreated me to save him, that I gave up my just anger against that treacherous servant, that unfaithful steward of my brother’s property.”

“It is useless,” said Constance—“I *cannot* do it! Why should I be called on to make such a sacrifice of myself?—to have my name coupled with that of such a nauseous wretch?—to be exhibited in a court of law as the wife of such a creature, even for the purpose of getting rid of him?”

“He will never have courage to claim you when he finds it is illegal ; nor would he be rich enough to pursue you by law.”

“I cannot!—I cannot! Why should I make such a sacrifice?” she exclaimed.

“Ah!—why, indeed?—*I* know not. The old man talks of some dying daughter, whom he wishes to be allowed to die in peace. Perhaps he thinks, too, that you love both him and her. But, as you just now observed, you are a lady, and cannot be expected to care for these poor people, who have nursed you all your short life. Come, we may as well go down, and no longer keep your father in suspense.”

He rose and went down, and Constance followed him. As she stood on the last stair, she heard Saint Cyr speak thus—

“Well, Penrose, I am sorry for you, but the young lady will not relent, even to save you from transportation, old man ; and I

am sorry, too, for your disappointment, Maurice ; but ladies will be fanciful sometimes."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," replied Maurice. "I never waste words—not I. Come, Master Penrose, you must come along with me to the county town—you must be lodged in gaol before morning."

Penrose got up to obey him. He saw there was no hope ; but as he turned to leave the door, he gave one heart-broken look at Constance. He did not mean that it should be one of appeal for pity, but overwhelmed as he was by his own misery, he thought of her left unprotected in the power of a man so dissolute as Saint Cyr. His countenance expressed his anxiety for her, but Constance, thinking not of herself, and too innocent to apprehend danger, read the look as one of entreaty to her to save

him. She could not withstand the fancied prayer for help, which she read in those dim eyes, and forgetful of everything but her wish to save him, she cried—

“I will!—I will marry him!”

As she spoke she reeled, and fell fainting to the ground.

“What’s to be done?” said Saint Cyr, really concerned. “Poor girl!—poor child!”

Penrose leant over her, and raised her on his arm.

“Father, are those men gone? Oh! what a frightful dream!”

Saint Cyr drew the park-keeper out of the hut.

“Better let them alone now; we’ve got them all right. She can’t draw back—we’ll have her father if she do. To-morrow we’ll arrange the when and where,” and they left Constance and Penrose in solitude.

Saint Cyr took care not to leave the neighbourhood till Constance's fate was sealed. As there was now no reason that he should conceal his presence, he came the next morning to Boscobel, and took up his abode there. It is true that he saw nothing of Constance, who scarcely left her mother's room; but the knowledge that he was in the house damped the unhappy child's spirits, and kept continually in her mind the danger of her father, and the means by which his safety must be purchased.

Notice was posted in the county town, on the door of the registrar office, of the marriage of James Maurice and Constance Rivers. Constance knew nothing of it. Her father, weighed down by shame, kept away from her, and only spoke to her in his daughter's room when compelled.

Notwithstanding all that Saint Cyr had said with regard to the illegality of the

intended marriage, he meant to take good care that it should be binding. As the wife of a drunken profligate man, Constance would be an easy prey, and a convenient mistress, when the seclusion of Boscobel became necessary by the importunities of his creditors; but should her real father recall her to his home, when her foster-mother died, she would, as Miss Rivers, and the child of a wealthy and respected gentleman, be removed from his reach.

One morning her father told her she must come. All was ready. The present difficulty pressed most heavily on poor Constance's mind.

“How can I excuse my going to ma?”

“Is she awake?” said her father, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. “Then I will speak to her. My lass!” he began, with an attempt at cheerfulness, “I want to take your child for a drive. She is getting pale

and thin, and neighbour Brown has lent me his pony and gig, that she may take a little fresh air."

Patty looked anxiously at her child, who was pale enough to confirm all Penrose had stated.

"My darling! my poor beautiful child! you have nursed me till all the colour has faded out of your face. Go with father, it will do you good. Stay, take my best shawl, you may be cold."

"Thanks, dearest ma," said Constance, kissing her. "Oh! my poor ma," she said, inwardly, "you little know what sacrifice I am going to make for you and father."

"Father," she said, stepping into the gig, "have you got it?—have you got the bond?" and she shuddered.

"Yes, child, safe enough," said he, slapping the pocket of his waistcoat as he drove off. "He shall never touch thee, and

long before the six months are over thee shalt be free, and I out of the country."

Constance tried to think it would be so, and to pacify her terrors by this conviction ; yet she shuddered with disgust when she saw her future husband waiting at the door of the registrar's office. He was a handsome-looking man when his face was not swollen by intemperance, well-formed and tall, and neatly dressed in his new velveteen jacket and leather gaiters, made expressly for the occasion. He handed Constance out of the gig in a hang-dog manner, as if he were conscious that nothing but strong necessity had procured her consent to be his wife ; yet there was a glitter in his dark hazel eye that showed his delight at the thought of possessing so much beauty, and such a lady.

The expression of consent from both parties was soon over, and Constance com-

forted herself by thinking it did not seem at all like a real marriage. As they left the office, Maurice approached Constance to claim his first bridal kiss; but Penrose put him back roughly—"Thee knowest the agreement!"—and placed the trembling Constance, who had clung to her father, in the gig. Maurice went to spend the rest of the day in a public-house, whilst Penrose silently drove Constance back to Boscobel.

CHAPTER XI.

“My glass is half unspent ! forbear t’arrest
My thriftless day too soon ; my poor request
Is that my glass may run but out the rest.”

QUARLES.

CONSTANCE’S life passed after this so peacefully that, in making the end of her mother’s life as easy as her bodily pangs permitted, her thoughts were occupied to the almost exclusion of the loathsome secret that was to mar her destiny. Her father seemed never to have recovered the detection of that night. The elders greeted him as usual. In the congregation the men touched their hats, and the women dropped their curtsies as respectfully as before ; but Penrose knew that he walked on hollow

ground, that might at any moment give way under his feet. He could not keep up the sham of *well-to-do-ness* much longer. If he could not longer steal to cover the deficiencies in his accounts, these deficiencies must be discovered. A little longer the baker might give him credit, but even he must wonder that his bill was not liquidated. "When Master Penrose never could bear to let it stand a week formerly!"

Penrose had always believed in his own righteousness, till he fell beneath the gigantic temptation which Saint Cyr had placed before him. Even when he was robbing his master, the delusion clung to him that he was an upright man, because all his little world believed him to be so; but on the eve of detection he saw himself with the alien eyes that would regard him ere a few weeks were past.

"Oh! that I were in the days that are

past, when God regarded me!" said the miserable man.

He tried to comfort himself in the tenets on which he had hitherto relied, that all things were ordained before the foundation of the world—consequently, his fall from righteousness was inevitable. There is a certain self-importance very seductive to the human mind in the idea that each individual is the peculiar care of the Almighty; consequently, that millions of years before the birth of Penrose it was ordained that he should be tempted to speculate in a bubble company, and should fall from righteousness in consequence. But when it came to the test, the doctrine broke down. He was too sensible not to feel that he had had free will to choose or to reject what Saint Cyr had offered. He felt, however, if that light of doctrine was withdrawn, he had no other to trust to. The star by which

he had been guided had disappeared, and in the sudden darkness he knew not whither to turn. The idea of death was very terrible to him, but it seemed always distant.

'Tis strange how the continuance of life gives it a feeling of stability. A young girl of seventeen, beautiful and beloved, who dies after a few days' illness, shows, by papers found after her death, that for three years she had been preparing herself to meet that awful presence. A woman of seventy-eight dies without a will, not having anticipated that death could reach her so soon.

Penrose knew that he must die some time or other; but he was most troubled how to bear himself in the present world—the future one, though dark and terrible, needed not occupy him yet. He must fly—he could not stay there, an impoverished man, pointed at by every one as the robber of his master, the defrauder of the widow

and orphan. Yet he had lived boy and man on the Boscobel estate for sixty-five years. How could he find a new home in a foreign land, when the few pounds that would take him across the water were exhausted? He had made his happiness to consist in the ambition of being a man of mark amongst his fellows, and in the accumulation of money. His gods were knocked down—their “feet of clay” had crumbled beneath them. Where could he seek others to consecrate the dreary home he pictured for himself in America? He had a brother settled in Canada as a small farmer, but he had had no communication with him for years, and had never cared particularly for family ties. Patty had been the representative to him of her salary and of Constance’s £50 yearly. He had thought of her more as a means of pecuniary advantage than as a person on whom to lavish love, though

Patty's gentle nature had expanded in affection for him and for her foster-child, the only two objects in life for her.

Penrose thought of these matters till his brain reeled at the contemplation. Vague plans chased each other through his brain. At one time he speculated whether he would wait for Patty's death, which her doctor told him was now imminent; and then, taking Constance to her father, he would throw himself on his mercy, and entreat for a small annuity on the score of his daughter's love and care for his child.

But common sense banished the notion. Mr. Rivers, as a man of business, would probably hand him over to a policeman for his theft, even if he concealed for the time the fact, which must ooze out ultimately, that he had married Constance to a drunken park-keeper to screen himself from the consequences of his crime.

Should his brother in Canada consent to receive him, how could he bend his pride to ask charity and shelter from a younger man than himself, when from his age and failing health he could earn so little towards his own maintenance; for Penrose, who had been as a giant in strength and power, had felt the anxieties of the last three weeks tell on him, in wasted flesh and slackened muscle. Thus pondering, neither food nor sleep repaired the waste of daily thought. Patty and Constance watched him anxiously, seeing the great alteration in his appearance.

“Father,” said the former one day, when he was sitting opposite her bed, with his head leaning on his hand; for he was silent now when he came to see her—the string of texts from which he had been wont to select those he considered suitable to her state, he now felt to be like the words of a

spell which had lost its power His religion had not availed to his guidance through life. How could he hold it out as a staff to her through the valley and shadow of death? To him it had been a rod of chastisement—not as a staff of support.

“Father, ain’t it lonesome now o’ nights in the cottage? Not a soul within a mile of you. Father, you’re not so young as you were. I wish you would have somebody to keep your house.”

Penrose replied gruffly that he wanted no one; but as Patty and Constance returned to the attack whenever he came to see his daughter—he consented to take a little boy in, to sleep in the house, though he grudged the supper which would be the nightly price of the boy’s company. The old man was particularly clean in his person and house.

“Cleanliness is next to godliness,” he used to say, and it was some time before he pitched upon one who pleased him. The child was to go to him on Monday evening, and Saturday night had now arrived. In the meantime, Maurice could not dismiss from his fuddled brain that he had a beautiful young wife, who was his property, “to have and to hold,” from the possession of whom he was withheld by the bond he had given Penrose, which Saint Cyr had compelled him to sign. He was ignorant and besotted, and never allowed his mind to clear itself from the effect of his daily potations.

Saint Cyr knew that it was utterly worthless in point of law ; but he argued that if both Penrose and Maurice believed in it, the effect would be the same. Saint Cyr was cognizant of some acts of Maurice’s which would not bear the light of day nor judicial

investigation, and thence arose the authority he exercised over him.

In the absence of Saint Cyr, Maurice, though he hated, no longer feared him. What he did fear was that Penrose should come down on him with this bond, and sell up his goods and cattle—the blood-mares and their foals, which he delighted to breed, and to feed at his lord's expense in the Park; the nice little horse which he meant to enter for the Bodmin races.

“That cursed bond!” he said repeatedly. “’Twas a shame to diddle a fellow out of his wife so! Such a beautiful creature! So delicate! And yet, though she is my wife, I dare not take even a single kiss. I was nigh a-doing it, though, at the office, only for that old Hunks—I wish he was dead—who was so shameful grumpy.”

And then he wondered whether Hunks would give it up at once—for a sum of

money down ; and for the better elucidation of his thoughts, he went to the ale-house, and drank till a late hour.

CHAPTER XII.

“The panting slave is held in chase,
And falters in the desperate race;
Thick throbs her heart in deep distress,
Near and more near his footsteps press.
She scarce can draw her labouring breath,
Maddened by fear to rush on death.”

IT was about two o'clock, and the light was scarcely giving a line against the dark sky, for it was the tenth of August. Constance was sleeping, as she always did now that her mother's health was a constant cause of anxiety to her, compelling her watchfulness.

She was startled from her troubled dreams by hearing a knock at the door—the outer door at the back of the house. Some ill-

news about her foster-father, she thought; and her first idea was to find out its import, and conceal it from, or reveal it to her mother as circumstances should compel. She did not wait to dress thoroughly, but threw her morning-gown over her night clothes, put on her stockings and shoes, and went down softly to open the door.

“Who is there?” she cried; but there was no answer, and after asking again without obtaining a reply, she thought either that the person had gone round to the front, or that, which seemed to her most probable, she had dreamed of the knocking, and no one was there. Thus, fearing nothing, she threw open the door, and saw standing against the grey light the figure of her husband. “What is it?” she said, trembling, for she saw he was very drunk, and his countenance was terrible in its loathsomeness.

She stepped back as she spoke, but he advanced towards her, saying—

“This is it. You’re my wife, and as my wife I’ll have you, and no nonsense.”

“The bond !” she shrieked in her agony.

He laughed a hoarse discordant laugh.

“I’ve got it here. I got it from the old man, and now either I come in here, or you come to my cottage. Take your choice.”

“My mother is asleep,” said Constance, with white lips! “do not awake her. I’ll put on my bonnet and shawl and come with you, if you will wait for me a minute.”

“Well, remember, if you don’t come to me, I shall follow you up to your room.”

Constance turned away with a beating heart. She thought of nothing now but self-preservation ; she could not be safe in the house, she feared, through which he would search till he found her.

“A little time!—oh! but for a little time!” gasped the poor girl, as she fled through the passages, flinging down the candle as she went, hoping it might be extinguished, yet not daring to look back to see if it were. She gained the drawing-room window, and opened the shutter silently—then tried to lift the sash, but it would not move. She had, trembling all over, to try another shutter, and another window, and then—oh, blessings! it was flung up, and Constance sprang out, and away over the flower-beds—over the railings which divided the garden from the park—blindly she fled, with no distinct notion whither she was going.

“Anywhere—anywhere out of the world!”

she would have said, had she ever heard that line. Constance had never been a very good runner—her lungs were too delicate,

but now she seemed to skim along the ground, so much had fear winged her feet.

“But oh! I can’t go on much farther!” was the thought in her heart, as her breath became more and more laboured. She heard the brutal cry of Maurice—a cry of exultation as he felt himself gaining on her! The flaring of the unextinguished candle had betrayed her course through the passage, and the open shutter and sash had told the rest.

“He shall never take me—I will die rather!” she thought.

Speech or cries were impossible; her breath was nearly gone. Almost instinctively she directed her steps down a declivity—she could go faster thus, she thought. There was a roaring stream rushing through the park between deep banks—the sides were rocky and precipitous.

“I will throw myself in—he won’t follow me there!”

She rushed along a footpath, without considering where it led, but simply because it was easier to run over. It led to a plank which had long been disused, because considered dangerous, whilst so few people ever passed it, now the family never came into Cornwall, as it led only to an ornamental and romantic part of the grounds, which had become a wilderness. The plank gave her a thought of escape; if she could pass it, and Maurice could not, she should have time to escape—at any event, for the present. At another moment she should have hesitated, and tried one small foot first, and then the other, holding on by the overhanging branches—now she fled across it as swiftly as her failing breath would permit. She stooped and tried to move the plank, which had become embedded in the

soil. She tried all her failing strength, seeing Maurice rushing after her down the acclivity opposite. All her powers were insufficient to loosen it from its hold on the bank on the other side ; all she could accomplish was to raise one side of it, and once raised it stood edge upwards.

She felt that he would put it right in an instant, and be over after her. She dared wait no longer. Again she fled away, her slight dress torn by and catching in the tangled thickets. She heard his shout of triumph as he reached the bridge ; she felt her strength deserting her with her senses, and she fell insensible on the ground.

When she recovered, the warm sun was playing on her face, and bringing freshness and beauty to all around her. She looked wonderingly at the long slanting rays which turned the grass to the golden hue of the back of a peacock's neck. She could not at

first recognize her position, nor how she came there. Objects looked so different viewed from the ground. She moved, and then she remembered, by the weariness of her limbs, all the horrors of the past night. The first thought was, after a fearful joy at her escape, that her mother might have expired in her anxiety at her absence.

“Where was Maurice?” she wondered. “Why had he not followed her to her covert? Could he have lost sight of her in the dense foliage, and gone on?”

She knew not; but she did not dare to retrace her steps that way to the house. She moved stealthily through the thicket, and returned by a circuitous path. The drawing-room window was still open; she entered, and shut it. Softly—very softly—she stole to her mother’s room; she was sleeping quietly. She entered the next, where the little maid slept, as hard-working

girls of fifteen will sleep. It was five o'clock. She went down, and took up the candlestick, and destroyed the marks of its having blazed down on the stone passage, and crept to the back door, and re-fastened it. Then, shivering, she went upstairs, and throwing off her damp and torn dress, she went to bed, and slept soundly, for bodily fatigue deprived her for the time of apprehension for the future.

Constance slept late on the following morning, and was roused at length by Patty, who asked if she would not get up and make Miss Penrose's breakfast. Constance got up hurriedly to atone for her omission, but when the duties of the sick-room were performed, and the Psalms, Epistle, and Gospel duly read, she had time for unhappy thoughts. Her father must have betrayed her by giving up the bond.

"How *could* he?" she asked herself.

And having the bond, James Maurice might come at mid-day and demand her—and could her foster-mother protect her? Would not the terror and the struggle kill her outright? She would not leave the house, and would keep the doors bolted. Perhaps he would not come, if sober. Then she reflected how rare an occurrence was his sobriety, and could take little comfort from that consideration. The day passed on unmarked by any event, and evening drew in.

“Constance, father is not come yet,” said the daughter.

It was a self-evident proposition, and Patty knew it was so; but she always relied on Constance for some comfort in her troubles.

“He is later than this sometimes, Ma—he may be here yet.”

“I don’t think he’s ever later than eight

o'clock?" rejoined the sick woman, querulously.

"Our clocks are fast."

"Not very."

"There is the church clock——"

Constance fancied that her mother wished her to go to the cottage, but with the experience of the past night she dared not.

"Shall Sally go and see why he does not come?"

"We'll wait a little," said Patty, thinking she was unreasonable, and anxious to save her little maid the walk.

After tossing restlessly for twenty minutes, Patty exclaimed, impatiently—

"I am a miserable creature! Time was when I should have run down there in a minute to see if there was anything wrong with father, but now nobody will go to please me!" and she turned her face to the wall and wept.

“Sally shall go!—go, Sally!”

“Yes, miss—what shall I say?”

“Only ask why Master Penrose has not been up to-day to see his daughter.”

“Yes, miss,” and she looked wistfully out into the coming darkness.

“Go to the farm, and ask your father to go with you, and I’ll give him sixpence for his trouble,” said Constance, in a whisper.

The girl ran off joyfully with this permission, and Constance sat by her mother’s side, and tried to talk cheerfully; but all her efforts sank into silence. Her mother could not recover her composure, and was so evidently listening, that Constance assured her that, unless Sally had met her father on the road, she could not have come back yet.

As grey shadows darkened over the room an undefined apprehension stole over her. She did not like to light the candle, lest her

mother should think it later than it really was; but she sat shivering, and filled with dread of she knew not what. At length she said she would go down and see if the kitchen fire was still burning. Father would like some tea if he came.

She went down, being eager to receive Sally's news when she came back. In a time so short as to seem almost incredible, Sally rushed in, her eyes starting from their sockets, her mouth open.

"Oh! Miss Constance, poor master—oh-o-o-oh! He's lying dead on the floor—he is indeed!"

"Hush! hush! it is nonsense—it *can't* be true."

"It is!—it is! I saw him a-lying with his head right agin the great chest—oh-h! Father was a-lifting him up, and I ran back to tell you."

There was a smothered cry, and the fall of a heavy body near them. Patty, who had not left her bed for weeks, had stolen down, in the extremity of her anxiety, to hear why her father had failed to pay her his usual visit, and, in hearing of his death, had received her own summons to eternity. Constance raised her head, and sent Sally for the doctor. Patty moaned feebly, but never again uttered an articulate sound. The kind man carried her in his arms, and laid her on her bed. Life lingered for some days, but consciousness never returned. Prostrated by her bed-side, and watching the gradual sinking of the sparks of life, Constance felt less than she otherwise would have done the death of the old man. The doctor would have concealed some suspicious circumstances from Constance, but little Sally's loquacity overran all prudence, and she told Constance that the poor old dear

had had a fight with somebody for a waistcoat he always wore in the day, and kept under his pillow at night; a piece of it was clenched in both hands, and the pocket was torn right off; and, what was strange, the money, a half-a-crown and a shilling, was rolled over the floor. There was a mark on the side of his poor dear head, but the doctor didn't know whether he might a-done it hisself in falling against the chest. There was to be a crowner's 'quest, and then folks would hear, no doubt.

Constance seemed frozen into stillness by horror. Her father had, then, yielded up his life in trying to retain the bond, which had been wrested from him by Maurice. And had he, her husband, dealt the death-blow? Who could say? Where was he now? Fled away like Cain, with the brand of God's vengeance on his brow! Would he come, with his hand reeking with his victim's

blood, to claim her as his wife? An inexpressible loathing and terror possessed her at the thought of that night chase—at the unutterable mixture of malice with lust which had actuated this peasant, who would have repeated in the nineteenth century the acts of the royal Darnley.

The police, by order of the magistrates, were doing their utmost to find out the person or persons concerned in the death of the old man. Suspicion fell on James Maurice, who had drunk freely on the night of the murder, but not so as to be incapable of knowing what he was about. He had declared, on that occasion, that if he did not get some paper he wanted out of “old Hunks,” as he called him, he would do for him. The landlord, finding him loud and troublesome, had turned him out at half-past twelve o’clock. No one had seen him since. Constance could have given some informa-

tion, had she chosen it; but she did not choose.

A search was made high and low for James Maurice. The long drought had prevented any footmarks being visible from Penrose's cottage. Maurice had not slept in his own home, nor had he been seen since he left the public-house. The search for him was utterly unavailing, till towards the end of the day a hat was discovered, carried along by the stream, some miles from Boscobel. This gave a clue; they searched the banks, and descended to the edge of the water, where it whirled and gurgled against the opposing rocks which lined its sides.

They followed the stream upwards, and just below where a narrow decayed plank spanned the water, they found James Maurice, caught by the branch of a tree, hanging partly in and partly out of the

water, with a severe concussion on his head from one of the rocks, on which it had struck in his fall, and quite insensible. They took him up ; and the awe-stricken peasants thought that in his punishment they saw the finger of God. He was taken to his cottage, and a nurse was hired to attend him ; and the doctor came and leeches and bled him. He was considered to be the murderer of Penrose, yet he had to be watched and attended like an innocent person.

The doctor believed that as the fumes of liquor were evaporated, and the brain recovered from the unnatural position in which he had hung for so many hours, it was supposed that he would recover his consciousness ; but hours, and then days passed, and Maurice had subsided into a drivelling idiot. Had he ever uttered anything about his marriage with Constance, the nonsense he talked constantly when intoxicated would

have deprived it of credence. Probably, however, he was unwilling to admit that he had married a girl whom he dared not claim, lest it should expose him to the jeers of his unrefined companions; and he in fancy indemnified himself for his forbearance when he considered how brilliant would be his triumph when he should produce Constance as Mrs. Maurice.

Constance heard of his state as she passed her hours in sobs and tears, kneeling by the bedside of her dying mother. How she hoped he would die, and take with him that dreadful secret! No one seemed to know it now but Mr. Saint Cyr. Her poor father was gone—for whose sake the sacrifice had been made—and her foster-mother in a few hours would follow him. How useless—how utterly useless had been her immolation! But for that her father might still have been in life, and her mother probably

might have lingered a few weeks more. But then, she had never known her father's disgrace—would now never know it; and the sympathy and respect shown by all classes at the melancholy circumstances of his death, proved that the character for probity which he had so much valued was yet unstained. How long it would be so she knew not. The absence of the trust-money must be discovered before long.

How she longed for wealth to replace it in the three per cents., before it could be missed! But Constance knew not that her maternal grandfather had left the small savings of his life, to accumulate for her till she attained the age of twenty, when she was to have the principal at her own control, without any reference to her parent or natural guardians.

This piece of information subsequently was communicated to her by letter, as a

profound secret, by Mrs. Mag, who charged her to look sharp after her own business, and not let herself be “choused” out of her rights.

Constance’s father came, as we have before related; and on the way to Town Constance accidentally was found by Saint Cyr, who, by a bribe to the porter, contrived to remain alone in the same carriage with her. The knowledge that he possessed a secret which, if known, would effectually crush her—the consciousness of her uncared-for life, and unprotected loneliness—seemed to point her out as a safe subject for licence.

Saint Cyr was not a man likely to be deterred by the real repugnance of his victim; but he could not still Constance’s cries, and thought it best to escape from the carriage, before he had had the awkwardness of being brought up before a police court to answer for his conduct, by which a degree of no-

tority would be obtained, which would result in sundry small accounts on the hall-table of his brother's town-house, with pressing applications for their discharge; probably to be followed by a still more pressing one if not attended to.

When he was sent for by Lady Levinge, at the suggestion of Captain Lymerton, he used his power, without saying how he had become possessed of it, in tormenting Constance—partly to please Lady Levinge, partly because he hated “the daily beauty” of Eustace's life. He hated not the man of pure morals and dauntless valour, for in neither did he care to rival him; but he hated the man who rode before him in the hunting-field, and left him far in the distance; the man whose eye was sought, whose taste was succumbed to by Lady Levinge, for whose preference Saint

Cyr had tried and failed. Thus he mortified and injured Constance in the eyes of her friends, and ended in being engaged in a duel, from which he would gladly have escaped could he have done so with any degree of credit. But, no, it should never be said at the clubs that Saint Cyr had shown the white feather—had come awkwardly out of that unpleasant affair at Earlscliff. He never could have shown his face again. Death would be preferable !

Constance's confession was written at first eagerly and fluently ; and though her thoughts still prompted her pen with rapidity, she felt less power of continued exertion. The appetite again revolted from London bread and London ; the habits of the house were like those of the " Medes and Persians, which alter not." There was a slice or two of bread and butter sent

to her room each morning, as a particular and needless indulgence, and a cup of tea, black-looking tea, innocent of cream.

This privilege of taking her breakfast in her own room had been granted, at her entreaty, by Mr. Rivers. The sullen looks and unresponded to salutation, when Constance had appeared on several successive mornings, had made her long to remain all day in the dreary little bedchamber, which looked on a confused mass of chimneys, seeming to Constance as if they had fallen there by accident, rather than been placed by design over happier hearths than hers.

Yet she had her small indulgences. Old John bought her a few biscuits now and then out of his own money; and the housemaid made her a partaker of a basket of apples, sent from the country as a present; and Constance looked so pleased, and ate the apples so gladly, that the housemaid felt

tears coming into her eyes, and made the gift a daily one as long as they lasted.

At dinner Constance dressed herself, and came down that she might see her father. He came at the usual hour every evening in the body ; but his mind was busily occupied, and I question whether he noticed the presence of his eldest daughter, except when it was necessary to offer her a slice from the joint, or the tart. All thought of appealing to him with regard to her own troubles faded from her mind, when she saw that he was fully occupied by worries of his own. If her marriage could be dissolved, her father must be the person to move in it ; but how little he would enter into the feeling which prompted her to consent to the disgrace which she had brought on herself.

He cared nothing for the old man who had so grievously erred, yet whom Constance had so tenderly loved. He would

thought the sacrifice absurd, undertaken to allow the sands of a failing life to run down unshaken by rude hands. She had thought of appealing to her father when he was unknown to her ; but the hope had expired when she saw daily and hourly how little she was to him, except as an incumbrance, and how heavily unknown burthens of his own seemed to press upon him. It was like a stream to a traveller, which seems so narrow when seen at a distance, and so easily to be leapt over ; but close, it is a broad and angry torrent.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Ah ! woe is me, from day to day
 I drag a life of care and sorrow ;
 Whilst Hope, sweet Hope, I hear thee say,
 Be calm ! thy ills shall end to-morrow.

To-morrow comes, but brings to me
 No balm disease or grief relieving ;
 And am I ever doomed to see
 Sweet hope thy promises deceiving ?

Yet false and cruel as thou art,
 Thy dear delusions I must cherish ;
 I cannot, must not, with thee part,
 Since I, with thee, alas ! must perish !”

CONSTANCE had heard once from Lady Yorke. She had inquired so anxiously for letters daily, that the housemaid had listened for the postman, and desired John to give *her* any for Miss Rivers, and not take them to the breakfast-table. Mrs. Rivers,

who was late that day, was sailing downstairs, when she met Mary the housemaid coming up.

“What are you doing on the front staircase, and what have you got there?” said the curious woman.

“Only a letter for Miss Rivers, ma’am.”

“Oh! indeed—” twitching the thin papered epistle out of Mary’s faithful hands—
“there, I shall take it to Miss Rivers myself.”

Mary withdrew discomfited, and the lady held the letter in her hand in a transport of indecision. She looked at the foreign post-mark, and noted the foreign paper, the most difficult to tamper with without discovery. She heard Mary’s steps going up the back stairs, and suspected that she was going to tell Constance that there was a letter for her, and Mrs. Rivers had taken it; and she suspected that Constance would

send down and demand it before Mr. Rivers, to which Mrs. Rivers would very particularly have objected; so she puffed upstairs herself to Constance's room, which she had never done since Constance occupied it, and seating herself by the bed, she said,

“There, my dear, is a letter for you.”

“My dear” for the first time. Constance, whose heart had been set into motion by Mary's information, only held out her hand for it.

“From Lady Yorke,” she said faintly, looking at her step-mother.

And she held the letter unopened in her hand. Mrs. Rivers was impatient.

“Well! what does she say? Ain't you going to read it?”

The urn was, no doubt, hissing away, and the tea was not made. So no time was to be lost.

“No, madam, not at present,” said Constance, pushing the letter under the pillow, and placing on it her flushed face.

“Well, indeed !” said Mrs. Rivers sullenly, “not very civil, I think !”

And she got up in a tiff, and walked down stairs.

Lady Yorke’s letter was opened eagerly by Constance as her step-mother descended the stairs—eagerly, but carefully, lest the smallest portion of a word should be injured. It was very kind in tone, and stated that Eustace was getting well, but that they should remain abroad as long as Mr. Saint Cyr’s state remained doubtful ; for that, though hope was entertained of his recovery, the result might be unfortunate. She spoke of the small occupations she had shared with Constance—of the pleasure they had afforded her, and of her regret at their “cessation”—she did not say “in-

terruption," as Constance remarked with a sigh.

"She does not expect they will ever be renewed."

It seemed to Constance that she said everything she could think of, in the way of small kindnesses, to balance the great grief which she knew Constance would feel when she read to the end, and found no message from Sir Eustace.

Constance sank down on her pillow and sobbed. With the self-delusion attendant on her state of health, which had repelled after the first few days the opinion given by Dr. Williams, she believed that she should recover—would recover directly, if she could go into the country again; and then, if that dreadful creature were to die—she scarcely dared to face the thought as to what might happen under the circumstances—would Eustace marry her then?

She did not know ; but she loved him with all the failing strength of her poor agitated heart. Was she wicked—clinging to life as she did for herself—to wish the death of another because he stood in the way of her happiness ? She knew not ; but she wished his death, and did not trouble herself with the immorality of the desire which could bear no fruit. Sally, the little maid, had described him to her as she had seen him. He was standing at the door of his cottage, of which the lower part was closed, concealing him nearly to the middle of his height. His beard had not been shaved since his accident, and stood out in coarse bristles. His animal mouth was blubbered and drooping, his hair straggling and dirty ; his hands hung like the paws of a kangaroo before his chest, and a little drawn in towards his side at the fourth finger. He kept a ceaseless motion of jumping up and

down without moving his helpless feet from the ground, and proclaimed his wants and wishes of the lowest animal nature to all the passers-by. Lust and intemperance still burned in his miserable frame, where all intellect was for ever darkened. A woman had charge of the miserable idiot. The sale of his effects kept him in all that was necessary for his comforts, such as they were. Nothing could be done beyond what had been already done for him. He might die at any moment, or he might live for years, the doctor said.

All she could tell, Constance told to Lady Yorke in the voluminous quantity of letters in which her narrative was embodied. When all was said, she looked over her small store of money, and found that she had not wherewith to buy postage stamps enough. She could not bear the delay, and begged John to lend the money

to her, and to take the letter to the post and pay it himself. The man looked at the address, and seeing it was to a lady, he promised, and kept his word.

The letter was paid, and sent to the address Lady Yorke had given—and Constance waited with trepidation for the answer.

“What will they think?—will they consider me very weak—very wrong?—they are both so strict!” was the dreary conclusion to all her musings.

She fancied how Eustace would look as he read on—how stern his handsome face would become. “They must be sorry for me a little—a very little!” she thought.

Meanwhile her small debt to John weighed on her mind. She waited till her father had gone into his library to put down a bundle of papers, and then said timidly,

“Papa, will you give me some money?”

“Money! I believe people think I am made of money! Well, how much do you want?”

“Five shillings,” said Constance, finding it difficult to steady her voice, her tears being rebellious.

Mr. Rivers was softened. His other girls never asked for less than five pounds. He took it from his pocket, and said she was a good girl, and did not trouble him often.

And now Constance suffered the torments which all who love have felt in absence, when doubts arise as to the health or affection of their correspondents.

Day after day went on, and brought no answer from Lady Yorke. Constance began to sink rapidly under the prolonged suspense. Her sleep was not refreshing, and she awoke with a trembling heart, to sit up and listen in her small bed for the

distant ring of the postman. There were other posts in the day to be watched for, and Constance grew thinner in her anxiety for news of the absent ones.

One day there really was a letter for Constance, and she seized it in the hope that, as it was on thick paper, Lady Yorke might have returned to England; but it was that which we have already mentioned from Mrs. Mag, containing the intelligence of the money to which she would be entitled on attaining her twentieth birthday. It wanted but a few days of this; and the fact gave Constance a slight interest, that in some degree interrupted the strain on her nerves, which her expectation of a letter from Lady Yorke occasioned.

The day arrived, unnoticed by any of her family. Tears filled her eyes when she thought of the little feast made by her foster-mother on these occasions, of the

efforts Patty had made to keep all her preparations a profound secret, and the effort Constance had made not to discover them till the right moment. Then the old game-keeper would come up with a ribbon for her hair, or a worked collar for her neck, purchased expressly for her at Launceston. Both were gone, and now no one loved her—and she thought of Eustace, and wept. However, she had work to do, and she took old John into her councils. She waited till she could speak to him alone, and asked if he knew of a respectable lawyer.

“Yes.”

“Was he the professional adviser of her father?”

“Well,” John said, “he knew two good uns—very. One belonged to his master, and the other didn’t.”

And when Mrs. Rivers and her daughters were taking their daily drive, she put on

her bonnet and cloak, and taking with her Mrs. Mag's letter, she walked to a cab-stand and drove to the lawyer's. Luckily she found him at home, and to him she confided her trouble about the memory of her foster-father, and her wish that the money should be taken from the sum to which she was entitled on her birthday, and replaced in the funds, if possible, soon enough to prevent her father-in-law's defalcations from being known.

He was touched by her beauty and simplicity, and promised to find out first whether the fact was as stated by Mrs. Mag; and if it were, to do what was necessary for the fulfilment of her wishes. Constance bowed and left him.

“Poor girl, she may as well dispose of her money whilst she can—it will save the legacy-duty,” and he took steps immediately on her behalf.

Of her disastrous marriage Constance had said nothing. It was the most painful part of the story, and Constance shrank from a recital which was revolting, and, as she believed, useless.

“Oh! if I could get away, I should breathe better,” was Constance’s constant feeling. There would be a few hundreds left of her money, and she thought she would take a lodging in the country when she got it. Every evening the little bedroom seemed hotter and more stifling when she went up to it. It caught the last rays of the autumn sun.

Various were the taunts uttered by Mrs. Rivers and her step-sisters.

“Your great friends seem to have cast you off, Miss Rivers. I thought the intimacy was too hot to hold!” said Miss Charlotte.

“Why, I thought you was to have mar-

ried the baronet right off," said the youngest ;
"and I hoped to have been bridesmaid ;
but I suppose he didn't think *nothing* of
you !"

N.B.—Mrs. Rivers was Essex by extraction.

"Just so," said Constance, with a faint smile. Their small malice had no power to harm her in the presence of an overpowering anxiety.

Just as this conversation had concluded, a smart rap, or, rather, a continuation of raps, was heard at the door. Constance rose to retire to her garret, being unwilling to see any of her step-mother's guests ; but she was too late to get further than the landing at the top of the stairs, when Lady Yorke caught her to her breast.

"My poor child !" was all she could say.
"Let us go somewhere where we shall be
alone, my dear."

Constance walked down with her friend to the library and shut the door, and then said, with a tremulous voice, and conscious face,

“How is Sir Eustace?”

“You may guess by my being here,” said Lady Yorke; “I had intended to have started at once, as soon as I received your long letter; but Eustace became more feverish, and his wound inflamed again, so that I did not like to leave him; but I hope all danger is past,” said Lady Yorke, hurrying her words. “And now I am going home, and I want you to come and stay with me again, that I may try to get a little flesh on your poor bones, for really, Constance, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for being so thin,” and she tried to smile, but tears were in her eyes.

“I should get well, I know, directly,” said Constance, “if I were with you in the

country. What a kind friend you are to me ! When may I come ?”

“ I will take you now, if you can come at once.”

“ I must ask papa first,” said Constance ;
“ not that he will care.”

“ Then I will call for you after breakfast to-morrow,” said the lady ; and, kissing Constance, she left her, glad to get away and recover herself, before she betrayed how much she had been shocked at the change in her appearance. That evening she wrote to Eustace.

“ Eaton Square, October.

“ I have seen Constance, and arranged to fetch her to-morrow and take her to Elm Hall ; but first I shall, if I can, induce her to see Doctor W——, to know if anything can be done for the benefit of her health. There need be now no struggle in your mind as to the expediency of trying to obtain a

dissolution of the marriage, nor any doubt as to whether you would do well to marry a girl whose name would have to be brought up so prominently before the public. Constance herself has, I think, from her narrative, no idea that such a divorce is feasible, nor am I sure that, were it put before her, she would accept her liberty at the price of of holding up her foster-father to obloquy, and blacking a reputation of which he was so careful, and to try to preserve which he perilled his liberty in this, and his soul in the next world. There is no doubt of her love for you. It was so evinced in her look and her tone of inquiring for you; but, Eustace, it is useless to think of any but the tenderest pity for her—love is out of the question; and, if I am right in my conjecture, I must use every effort to make the remainder of her life as happy as the last hours of existence can be made. Alas! not

much can be done by the utmost skill and attention in such cases. I do not know whether you would like us to join you abroad, or whether you will, perhaps wisely, prefer not seeing more of her from whom you must so soon be separated. If you would rather we should not join you, I shall go with Constance to any climate which the doctor recommends as most likely to suit her during the coming winter, even if he chooses Madeira. I trust, however, that it may be Italy, or the South of France, as I rather dread the sea-voyage for her. Let me know, and address me at Elm Hall. I hope you are as well as when I left you. I shall not, in that case, regret that I came. The poor child must have a miserable life where she is, and be deprived of the faint chance of recovery."

Eustace was never given to spreading his feelings over a surface of hot-pressed cream-

laid paper. He had been a man of action all his life. His answer was brief :

“I shall go to Boulogne, and remain there till you can bring Constance over. Then we will go anywhere that may be recommended by Doctor W—— for the benefit of her health.”

When Constance returned to the drawing-room, after her brief interview with Lady Yorke, she found her step-mother and her daughters sitting in their most upright position, their skirts arranged so as to show the folds and flounces to the best advantage; and Mrs. Rivers, with her stiffest and most vinegar aspect, prepared to look daggers at Lady Yorke, for the preference she had shown Constance over her own daughters. She looked anxiously past Constance as she came into the room, with “Well!” uttered by each lady in different tones of aggravation.

“Yes?” said Constance, interrogatively.

“Where is Lady Yorke? Why did she not come into this room?”

“Lady Yorke is in her carriage. Probably she did not come here because she met me, whom she came to visit, on the stairs.”

“Very ill-bred, I call it, to come to a house and not inquire for the mistress of it. What did she want?”

“I have just stated that she wanted to see me,” and with that the ladies had to be content.

Constance waited to see her father before he saw his wife, and as he went into the library on his return from the City, she spoke to him and said that Lady Yorke wished to take her into the country.

“Her ladyship is very kind. I suppose it will be the best thing for you, Constance.”

“ Oh ! yes, papa. I am sure I shall get well if I can get into the country.”

“ Very well.”

“ Kiss me, and say good-bye to me now, there is no one to see us.”

“ Yes, certainly ; but you are not going directly ?”

“ No, to-morrow morning.”

“ Do you want some money ?”

“ If you would give me a sovereign,” said Constance, flushing painfully.

He gave it, and she kissed both cheeks, saying, “ Good-bye, papa !” And he returned the farewell kiss with something akin to tenderness, as he saw how ill she looked.

“ But, after all, she was better out of the way now, and for ever. She only kept Mrs. Rivers in constant ill-temper whilst she remained in the house. It was a good thing Lady Yorke had taken a fancy

to her !” And so he dismissed the subject from his thoughts.

Constance was busy at six o’clock in the morning, with flushed face and shaking hands, packing her small wardrobe. She was a long time about it—stooping was made so difficult by her shortened breathing.

“There’s something up,” said Mrs. Rivers to her daughters.

“Constance was the something,” said Jane. “She was moving about in her room for a long time before breakfast.”

“Go up, just by accident, you know, and ask her if she wants anything,” said Mrs. Rivers.

And Jane went, and saw on the bed the darling little dress of Pamela, and the case of the necklace.

“Bless me ! well, I never !” said the girl, seizing the case and opening it. She was speechless on seeing its beauty, and took it

out and placed it on her throat, looking at herself in the glass. "What a trumpery little glass! I'll go down to my own room and look at myself."

"Pardon me," said Constance, "I cannot permit it."

"Why not, pray? I shan't eat it nor drink it!"

"Simply because I shall have no time to spare, and I am going to put it away."

Jane turned away sullenly, and then ran down to excite the envy of her mother and sister by the wonderful account of Constance's wealth.

"We'll ask her to put it on when she dresses for dinner," said Jane.

But, alas! for the young lady's ungratified wish. In half an hour's time Lady Yorke's carriage came for Constance, and she went to the drawing-room, and took leave of her step-mother and her daughters with a civility

which their conduct and feelings towards her did not deserve.

“She’ll marry that Baronet, after all!” was Mrs. Rivers’s observation, gloomily. “Your father says she’s going to die, but I believe that is all affectation.”

Lady Yorke contrived that she should see Doctor W——, leading Constance to believe that he had called on herself as a friend. He adroitly questioned Constance about her health, and drew from her all the information he needed. To Lady Yorke he said that the young lady’s case, though a serious one, was by no means hopeless, and that under more favourable circumstances her recovery might be probable. Change of air and nutritious food would, of course, be the most remedial agents. Lady Yorke’s face beamed at this intelligence, for none know that better than those who nurse the sick. The notion of travelling lighted up Con-

stance's lovely face. She had never travelled, except from Boscobel to London, and from thence to Elm Hall. Lady Yorke provided her with every requisite for comfort and luxury in travelling, as if she had been a daughter who had drawn her nourishment from the lady's breast, instead of being an alien.

A few happy days were spent in preparation, and during these the lawyer to whom Constance had written, giving her address, wrote to say that her wishes with regard to her foster-father had been complied with; and that when his, the lawyer's, bill had been discharged, a balance of £700 14s. 8*d.* would remain, and wished to know in what securities she would like it invested.

Constance asked the name of Lady Yorke's banker, and desired that it might be placed in her bank till she might require it.

Before she left England she expended some of it in a handsome present to Mrs. Mag, and one to the housemaid at her father's, and to old John especially. It was so unusually pleasant to her to have the power of being liberal, that she was almost lavish—particularly for a young lady whose worldly goods consisted of rather more than six hundred pounds.

Happiness is a great renovator. Constance was elated that she had been able, by her small fortune, to save the memory of her foster-mother from reproach. She was going to see fresh scenes—she was going to see Eustace !

The weather was fine, and Constance enjoyed the short crossing of the channel to Boulogne. On reaching it, the ladies at the same moment recognized the grave, anxious eyes which were seeking them, and the next moment Eustace was at their side.

There was no mistaking the tenderness of his tone and manner, but in their first meeting there was a damp to their joy in the depression of his countenance. He had seen Constance for the first time, and Lady Yorke had become accustomed to her appearance. She was convinced, even, that she had rallied in the five days that had elapsed since she left her father's house, and she was correct in the idea that Constance was better.

Lady Yorke did all in her power to dispel the gloom which had settled on the brow of Eustace, knowing that cheerfulness was so necessary an ingredient in the successful treatment of a patient. So, if Eustace was inclined to be too clear-sighted, he concealed his dread, and gave himself up to the task of trying to make Constance happy. It would have been a mockery to have considered Constance as the wife of

the idiot at Boscobel. So Eustace took no trouble to conceal his devotion, and Constance was blessed in feeling her deep love for him returned. Each of the party was willing to enjoy all the happiness that the present hour could afford, without looking to the past or the future. Probably Eustace was least happy, for he was most apprehensive, and least deceived. Constance's increased look of health, her joyous spirits and renewed strength, seemed to promise years of future enjoyment.

Thus they travelled through the Continent, stopping wherever Constance liked to remain for rest or amusement—for they had wealth enough to permit the indulgence of every wish of an invalid, which may be considered as the greatest blessing it can bestow on loving hearts. The fresh scenery, the unusual costumes, the balmy air of the south, made Constance's life a

continual feast. She was very thin still, but “certainly better,” Lady Yorke assured Eustace; and he listened silently, scarcely daring to admit the ray of hope that flashed upon his mind.

Two pieces of information now reached them—both important, and both giving satisfaction. Saint Cyr was pronounced out of danger, though likely to possess in perpetual lameness the remembrance of Eustace’s chastisement; and from a letter forwarded to Constance from little Sally, thanking her for a liberal gift, Constance heard that James Maurice was dead. Some well-meaning acquaintance, who had known him in his palmy days, had given him a bottle of gin, unknown to his nurse, as the only means of making him “jolly,” and after lingering insensible for a few hours, from the effects of the spirits, he died, never having recovered the small portion of

sense that remained to him after the fall into the ravine.

Eustace followed Lady Yorke out of the room, after they had both read the letter.

“I had better marry her at once,” he said to his mother; “if she is to live, which God grant! she will be my dear wife; if she die, I shall be privileged to watch by her bed night and day, as the customs of society now forbid.”

Lady Yorke suggested whether they should apply to Mr. Rivers for his consent; and, though chafed at the delay, Eustace consented.

Constance smiled through her tears as she held up her face to kiss him. She was very happy in his affection; and would have been happier, had not her breathing been so oppressed.

The consent came in due course, with ex-

pressions of affection from Mr. Rivers, which were due to the future Lady Yorke, and would never have been given to Constance. Whether she died or recovered, it would be something for Mr. Rivers to drop with seeming indifference from his lips, in the presence of his friends in the City, that his eldest daughter was about to be married to that wealthy young baronet, Sir Eustace Yorke. So pleased was he, that he sent Constance £50, to spend in a wedding-present. There were also kind wishes from the ladies, and a line from Miss Charlotte, saying, that should the wedding take place in England, she and her sister should like to be bridesmaids ; and they begged their “ best love to their brother-in-law that was to be.”

Constance and Lady Yorke smiled ; but Sir Eustace, careless of women’s wiles, took no notice in his own mind even. It’s only a woman who understands a woman ; only

a thief who is calculated to be a good detective officer.

The fonder Eustace became of Constance, the more anxious his mother grew about her health. This was not the jealous irritability which she had always expected to feel when she saw a deeper love given to another, than she had ever elicited from her son towards herself. She was too devoted to Eustace not to prefer his happiness to her own; but, "if Constance can but live," she would repeat to herself, "I shall be quite happy!"

Eustace began to think that this blessing was in store for him. After looking at her fixedly one day, he said musing,

"I wonder how India would suit you?—if you do not think you would like it, I must exchange."

"You had better do that," she said sadly; "for the sake of Lady Yorke. Your mother

will be so sad, left alone, now that she has lost the elasticity of youth."

This answer depressed Eustace. He thought that Constance did not anticipate long life. She looked infinitely beautiful in her bridal dress, unbecoming as it generally is to young girls. They were married in the Protestant chapel at Marseilles, for they were weary of sight-seeing, and took a house in the country, above the City, where they hoped Constance might safely weather the winter.

Constance would have preferred returning to England, for she knew how much Eustace enjoyed hunting, that mimic war, when no real warfare could be found; but of this neither he nor his mother would hear. She herself lost hope occasionally, on the conviction of her increasing weakness; but a bright day, and a slight improvement in her symptoms, brought back all her elation. Her

life ebbed very gently, but it became certain, at length, to both Lady Yorke and her son, that Constance could not long continue with them.

CHAPTER XIV.

“My mighty grief hath not a tear—
 Fold, fold her shroud ;
 With all sad herbs strew, strew her bier—
 A sob, a sigh, thou shalt not hear ;
 My heart’s great grief to death so near,
 Weeps not aloud.”

SHE was always sweet and gentle, and only showed increased illness by depression.

“Oh ! that I might save her !” Eustace would exclaim with a feeling of agony. “Save *her*, even if she were the only good left to me—if, as her price, I was to be stripped of all my possessions, and have to work as a day-labourer for her support !”

And he clenched his hands, and hardened

the muscles in his vigorous arms at the thought.

“Constance, did you love me when you sought me that dreadful night?”

“I am a sad coward, Eustace—I could not have done it had not your life been dearer to me than my own.”

Eustace kissed her transparent hand with as much reverence as if she had been a saint. As spring advanced the malign influence attributed to that season by old medical writers showed itself in Constance’s increased weakness. Still she was able to sit up on a sofa, and when weary of that position, Eustace carried her about in the garden, in his arms like a child. Very light now was her attenuated frame.

“Take me out, Eustace,” one day she said, “I cannot breathe here; the air of the room is so close, and place me on the rustic seat under the acacia tree. Will mamma

come?" For she feared Lady Yorke might feel neglected.

Eustace called his mother, and then carried Constance to the garden-seat. There was a glorious sunset, in which the tranquil bay shone like a sheet of gold, made more brilliant from its setting of dark rocks; the trees were vivid with light green buds, and flowers of every varied class and colour covered the ground at their feet; the air was scented with perfumes, and balmy to the sense. Constance sat by Eustace's side, leaning her head on his shoulder.

"Don't put your arm round me, dear," she said. "I feel so stifled! Life is so beautiful," she said slowly, and with interrupted words, "it is so hard to leave it!"

"Are you feeling worse, Constance?" said her mother-in-law.

Constance placed one hand in hers, as Lady Yorke sat by her, and her head

drooped more heavily from the shoulder of her husband. He could not see her face, but knew that she had ceased to breathe.

“My poor Eustace!” said Lady Yorke involuntarily.

“Don’t pity me, for heaven’s sake! I can’t bear it, mother!” said Eustace, with the natural impatience of grief.

He said no more, but carried what had been his young wife back to the house. He could not bear that she should be buried there in a foreign land, and she was conveyed to Elm Hall, and placed in the family vault.

Eustace is still unmarried. He is too young still, and too manly to give way to unavailing grief; but he has not found another so lovely or devoted as the woman whom he loved so tenderly—his mother’s choice and his own.

Lady Yorke is still hoping that she may

find some lady worthy of him, lest he should miss, when passing through the valley of the shadow of death, the filial love which cheers and illuminates the way, but at present without success. Ambition has occupied the place of love in the heart of Eustace. He looked forward to being a general at an early age; and the efforts to attain the intervening steps cheer and occupy him. Ambition wants no companion—it is self-sufficient.

Lady Levinge suffered so much from her real passion for Eustace, that she wisely determined never to fall in love again, and to see as little as possible of the man who had so disturbed her comfort. She had a grudge against him for two reasons—one, that he had been proof against her fascination; and the other, that he had so spoilt the appearance of Saint Cyr, that he was no longer a creditable follower in her train.

“ Really, poor fellow !” she exclaimed, after seeing him for the first time after his return to England ; “ that sudden jerk in his gait makes him quite ludicrous ! ’Tis a pity, for his personal appearance was his chief recommendation.”

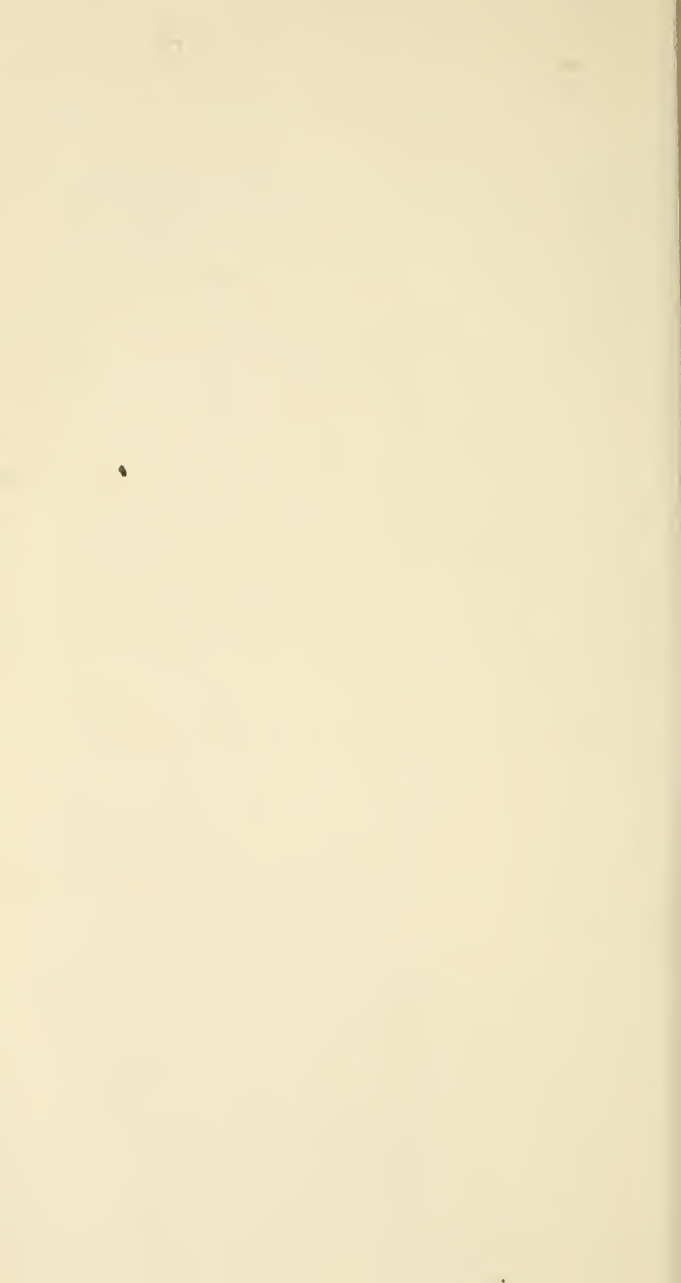
Good-natured Sir Richard Levinge had no notion of cutting a man because he had an unpleasant hop in his walk, and invited him as usual ; but Saint Cyr felt that his case was hopeless, and that the mistress of the house regarded him with contempt ; so he seldom visited Earlscliff, passing most of his time at the gaming-table, where he was at all times a successful player, but shunned by those who knew most of his style of play.

Twelve months had passed, when Lady Yorke received a letter from Mrs. Mag, begging her attendance at the “willy” on the occasion of her son’s wedding. Eustace was on duty with his regiment, and could not accept

the invitation. But Lady Yorke remembered Mrs. Mag's kindness to Constance, and made the good-natured woman supremely happy by her attendance at the party.

Theophilus was linked for life to the pretty young lady whom he had escorted on the day of the agricultural fête. I have not heard of any competitors for the hands of Miss Charlotte or Miss Jane. They are still to be obtained if any eligible young men should offer themselves.

THE END.



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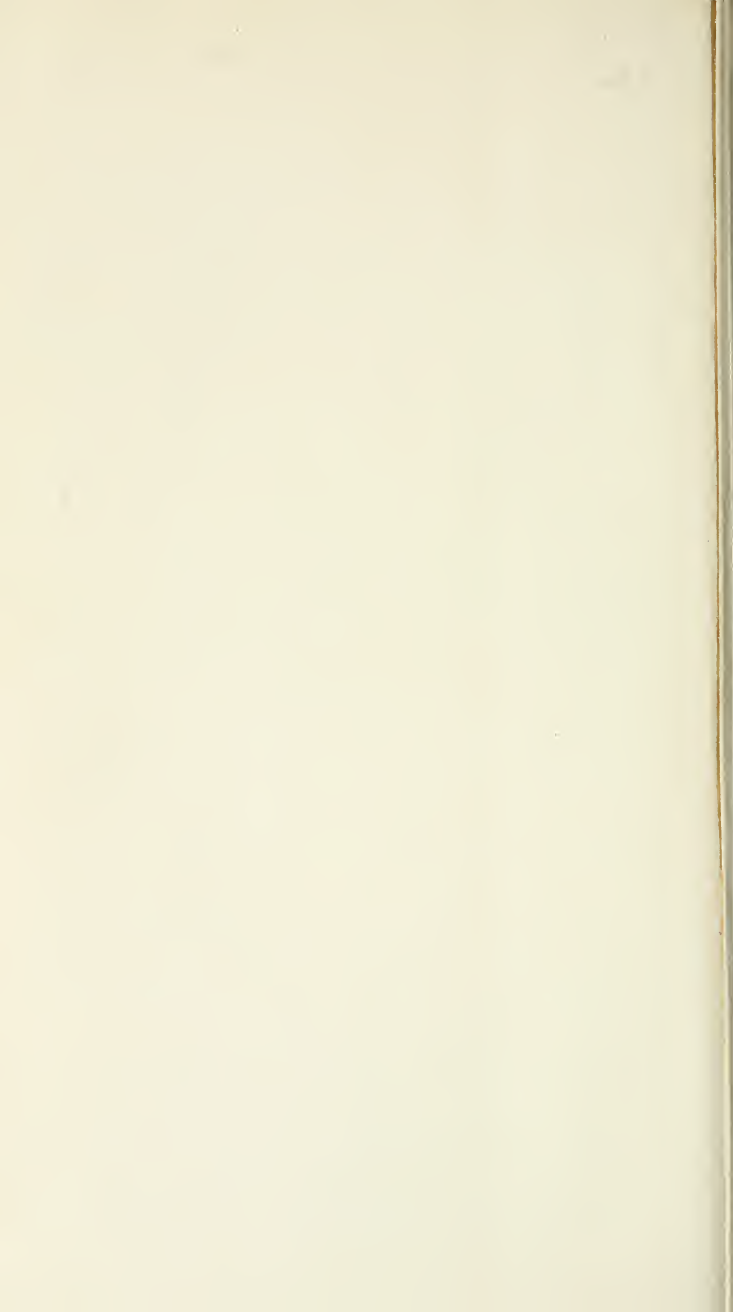
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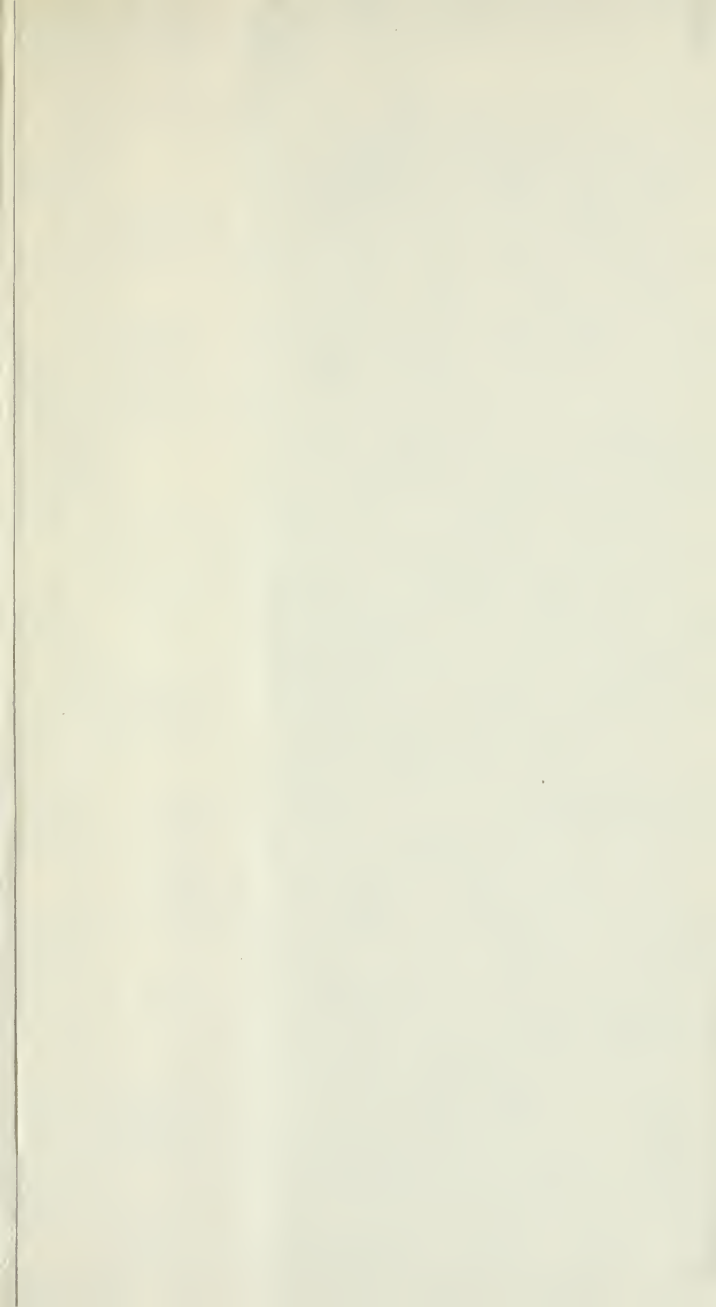
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